

LIPA Newsletter – 12.3.21

A lot can happen in a week! Last Friday, there was no known case of the COVID omicron variant in the United States. Seven days later, cases have now been identified in California, Hawaii, Colorado, New York, Nebraska and Minnesota. A lot of questions about this new variant remain unanswered but we have seen heightened interest at the federal and state levels in COVID testing, vaccines, and treatment. Late this morning, Governor Edwards held a [press briefing](#) to discuss the omicron variant and what Louisiana is doing to prepare. One of the points stressed was that “though hospitalizations from COVID-19 in Louisiana remain low, the state continues to lag much of the nation in its vaccines update, fueling concerns that fifth, deadly surge could be around the corner.” The Governor and Dr. Kanter, State Health Officer, strongly encouraged COVID vaccines for children and boosters as “the way out of this pandemic.” Just 49% of Louisiana’s population is fully vaccinated.

Shot for \$100 at Louisiana Community Pharmacies Launched This Week

Over 50 LIPA pharmacies are now participating in the *Shot for \$100* vaccine incentive with more being added next week. LIPA’s goal is 5,000 COVID vaccine first doses administered by community pharmacies before December 31 when the initiative is currently scheduled to end. With the January deadline for health care workers to get vaccine looming, approaching holidays and now the emergence of the omicron variant, many thousands of Louisiana residents ages 5 and older have not yet had their first dose of the COVID vaccine for a variety of reasons. What difference does a \$100 gift card actually make? Can it actually motivate someone to get the vaccine? One of our pharmacists did a vaccine clinic on December 2nd at a local nursing home. They were expecting 15 employees (first doses) and two residents and ended up vaccinating 32!!!! She had taken extra vaccine; once employees saw each other getting vaccinated and getting the gift card, they started lining up! They even called some family members to come get the vaccine and gift card as well.

While LIPA was allocated a limited number of cards for distribution by community pharmacies, please let us know if you missed the initial deadline but would like to offer the gift card incentive for vaccine first doses. Priority will be given to rural providers—**especially those in regions 3 (South Central Louisiana), 5 (Southwest Louisiana), 6 (Central Louisiana), 7 (Northwest Louisiana) and 8 (Northeast Louisiana)**. Send an e-mail to kennedy@lipa.org with your pharmacy name, address, and phone number to list on the Shot for \$100 website, the pharmacy’s primary Point of Contact (POC), vaccines you are administering and Days/Hours people can call for an appointment and/or walk ins.

Pharmacy Groups Join LIPA’s Fight to Regulate PBMs

This week, a court brief was filed by four pharmacy groups supporting a Louisiana law that requires pharmacy benefit managers administering Medicare Part D plans to reimburse pharmacies a 10-cent provider fee. [Pharmacy Groups Join Louisiana’s Fight to Regulate PBMs | NCPA](#)

CMS Announces Reimbursement for COVID Pediatric Vaccine Counseling

In a major [announcement](#) by the White House yesterday, CMS will require that **every state** Medicaid program reimburse for **COVID 19 vaccine counseling visits** in which healthcare providers talk to families about the importance of kids' vaccinations. The intent is to expand "individualized medical advice in all communities and give families the support they need to engage with trusted community providers [which it is well documented that community pharmacists are]."

CMS will now consider certain COVID-19 vaccine counseling visits for children and youth to be COVID-19 vaccine administration, for which state expenditures can be federally matched at 100% through the last day of the first quarter that begins one year after the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency [which means at least through March 31 of 2023]. CMS will match COVID-19 vaccine counseling-only visits at the ARP 100% federal match rate only when they are provided to children and youth under age 21 as part of the Medicaid Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit. Additionally, moving forward, CMS will require that states cover stand-alone vaccine counseling visits related to all pediatric vaccines under the EPSDT benefit. These state expenditures will be matched at the state's regular federal medical assistance percentage. CMS will be providing states more information on implementation during a call next week. Our federal partner, NCPA, is closely monitoring and advocating for the role of community pharmacies.

This week, the Administration is encouraging pharmacies to schedule vaccinations for the entire family and make it easy to do so. This ABC News [story](#) expands on that, stating that "Vaccine deserts, always present throughout the rollout, have been exacerbated for younger populations, with fewer vaccinators prepared to support children and their parents or guardians throughout the process."

Merck's Oral Antivirals Approved by FDA Advisory Committee on Tuesday

On November 30th, the FDA's external Advisory Committee narrowly approved Merck's new oral antiviral molnupiravir. LIPA has been working with LDH on plans for allocating the COVID therapeutic which is the first of its kind. Monoclonal antibodies must be administered via infusion or injection. The initial supply of molnupiravir is expected to be very scarce—much more so than vaccine, but unlike COVID vaccine, is expected to be dispensed exclusively at pharmacies.

On Thursday night, LIPA staff participated in an All-Member Zoom Call with our federal partner NCPA in which they provided an update with what they know about oral antivirals and their advocacy with CMS and the White House to assure that pharmacists are fairly compensated for assessment, prescribing and dispensing. A few notes from the call:

- The FDA still needs to meet to make recommendations for exactly who qualifies to receive the oral antiviral and what will be required as documentation of positive COVID test.

- The feds are encouraging state health departments to initially work with one or two partners on allocation and distribution. [pharmacy chain, PSAO group, state pharmacy association]. LDH is working with LIPA
- Amerisource Bergen has contracted with the federal government to distribute the drug.
- Reimbursement to the pharmacist—for assessment, for prescribing, for dispensing—is still to be determined.
- As a reminder, a course of treatment for molnupiravir will be five days: 40 capsules, with the patient taking 4 pills twice daily. Paxlovid by Pfizer is also a five-day course of treatment with [dose of 300mg](#) (Two 150mg tablets) of Paxlovid with one 100mg tablet of ritonavir, given twice daily for five days.

If your pharmacy would like to be added to the list of pharmacies doing assessments or prescribing and dispensing oral antivirals for consideration by LDH, you can send an e-mail to vaccines@lipa.org with the name of your pharmacy, its full address, and its phone number. *Note that your pharmacy does not need to be enrolled as a COVID vaccine provider in order to be considered for allocation of COVID oral antivirals.*

LDH Issues Reminder That State Law Requires ALL Vaccines Be Entered in LINKS

This week, the Louisiana Immunization Program issued a memo with a reminder that **all** vaccines should be entered in LINKS—not just COVID. **Louisiana Administrative Code** (Title 51, Louisiana Sanitary Code, Chapter 7, §703) was updated in April of 2020, and now makes it a **requirement/mandatory that all immunizations (including influenza vaccination) must be entered into LINKS within one week of vaccine administration** regardless of the patient's age. This requirement is for all licensed and credentialed immunization providers in Louisiana.