

September 14, 2021



Hi Team –

Now eight weeks into this latest fourth wave of COVID-19, our nation is experiencing the largest number of new infections, hospitalizations and, sadly, deaths since the peak of the third wave in January. And now taking steps to ensure that we do not face yet another fifth wave this winter, many businesses across the country, state governments and the President are putting in place some of the most aggressive measures to date to slow the spread of COVID and move the nation a step closer to achieving herd immunity to end this pandemic through vaccination.

Last Thursday, President Joe Biden announced a comprehensive set of initiatives aimed at halting the current COVID surge now fueled by the more contagious and more severe Delta variant. With this fourth wave disproportionately impacting the unvaccinated including children, an increasing number of U.S. hospitals – including some in our own region – find themselves at or nearing capacity due to this influx of COVID patients. Coined "Path Out of the Pandemic," Biden's six-point [plan](#) includes getting more people vaccinated, providing access to booster shots, keeping schools open, increasing testing and mask wearing, protecting the economy, and improving COVID-19 treatments. Immediately applauded by the American Medical Association and many other health organizations, a core component of the President's bold plan focuses on accelerating vaccination among eligible individuals through a series of employer-based vaccine requirements. These requirements extend to all hospitals and healthcare systems and other facilities that receive Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement, such as TriHealth, as well as many federal workers and private businesses regulated by OSHA with more than 100 employees. You can read more about the President's [plan](#) to end this pandemic [here](#).

While we welcome all efforts to end this pandemic, our fight against COVID has never played to political ideologies or any motivation other than our 170-year mission of improving the health of our community while protecting the safety of our patients, our neighbors, team members and physicians. Throughout the past 20 months, we have consistently "followed the science" to inform our decisions and guide our actions and behavior around COVID safety, treatment, surge and capacity management, and vaccine protocols. Along the way, the scientific evidence has helped us evolve our thinking and guidance on masking and PPE practices, patient care and treatment protocols, and vaccine best practices.

#### **Dr. Steve Blatt Interviewed on Growing Vaccine Misinformation**

Now ten months since the start of COVID vaccinations, our nation's vaccination rate still lags the threshold required to achieve herd immunity and this is due in part to "misinformation" which is causing some members of our community to remain unvaccinated. Unfortunately, this "misinformation" often lacks scientific rigor relying instead on flawed or incomplete research, anecdote, or even unsubstantiated conjecture. And it is frequently at odds with the fact based and peer reviewed research which has proven the safety and effectiveness of these vaccines—among the most studied vaccines ever, now administered to over 5 billion people worldwide—in significantly reducing serious illness and death. Sadly, for many, this "misinformation" has undermined confidence in the science and medicine and called into question trusted public and private institutions such as the CDC, FDA, Institutes of Medicine, and many more which we have relied upon for decades to guide our healthcare decision making. Our own Dr. Steve Blatt, System Chief for Medical Specialties and Infectious Diseases, as usual recently did a masterful interview providing facts and evidence in debunking many of these false claims, and I would encourage you to view it [here](#).

Since announcing our vaccine requirement in early August, many of us have had countless candid conversations with team members and physicians – in the hallways, during rounding, in our system-wide Vaccine Discussion Forums, through email and even by phone – revolving around concerns of vaccine effectiveness and safety. So, I want to share with you the same scientific evidence that Dr. Blatt, many of our physicians and I have shared in these conversations occurring everyday throughout TriHealth.

- A recent CDC study showed individuals who were not fully vaccinated were **more than 10 times more likely to be hospitalized**, and **11 times more likely to die of COVID** than those who were fully vaccinated.
- While no vaccine is 100% effective, this same study showed that all three available vaccines – Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson – are **90% effective at stopping hospitalization and 91% effective at preventing death** due to COVID.
- And yes, there have been breakthrough infections – individuals who have been infected with COVID after vaccination. But just last month, *The New York Times* reported that serious infections among breakthrough cases have accounted for less than 5% of COVID hospitalizations in the U.S. during this most current wave. While more research is being conducted on breakthrough infections, it is clear that these relatively rare instances make up a very small percentage of COVID hospitalizations and an even smaller number of deaths.
- Here at TriHealth, among the 22 COVID patients in our ICU last week, 12 were unvaccinated. Some of the remaining 10 patients were admitted to the ICU for non-COVID conditions but later tested positive as part of our ICU screening policy and were asymptomatic. Among these vaccinated ICU admissions who tested positive for COVID, all patients had existing comorbidities and/or were immunocompromised which unfortunately produces an inadequate antibody response to the vaccines. This is why the FDA first approved and prioritized booster shots for the immunocompromised population.

### COVID Update

In recent weeks, we have seen our COVID census continue to increase at TriHealth, this week topping 110 COVID patients with 18 in the ICU. And the overall positivity rate within our community remains an alarming 13.6%. The evidence is clear – hospitals are filling up more each day with unvaccinated COVID patients, challenging each system’s ability to care for ALL those in need of hospitalization—both COVID and non-COVID patients alike. And with nearly 35% of the eligible population still unvaccinated across the country coupled with workforce challenges in virtually every business sector including healthcare, each passing day brings with it a continued risk that our hospitals will be overwhelmed and be forced to delay care or, worse, turn patients away. Equally important, it serves as a call to action to redouble our efforts to increase vaccination rates here at TriHealth and across our country. I am encouraged at the progress we’ve made in the past six weeks with vaccinations – now accounting for more than 3 out of every 4 TriHealth team members and physicians being vaccinated—and remain confident we will achieve our 100% vaccination rate by the end of October.

### Vaccination Dates

As recently announced, we have set October 31, 2021, as the date by which all team members and physicians will be required to be fully vaccinated, unless they otherwise receive a medical or religious exemption or pregnancy deferment. To meet the October 31 date, vaccine sequences will need to occur as follows:

Vaccine Brand	First Dose Completed By	Second Dose Completed By
Moderna	October 2, 2021	October 31, 2021
Pfizer	October 9, 2021	October 31, 2021
Johnson & Johnson	October 31, 2021	N/A

Team members and physicians with proof of a positive COVID or antibody test and who choose to receive only 1 dose of Pfizer or Moderna to satisfy our vaccine requirement will need to complete their vaccination by October

31, 2021. And we are asking that exemptions for medical or deeply held religious beliefs be submitted by this Friday, September 17. You can access details on the exemption process on [Bridge](#).

**Join Us Tomorrow for the September Team Member Town Hall at 12pm!**

If you're able, be sure to join us tomorrow, Wednesday, September 15 at 12pm for our monthly Town Hall, livestreamed on [Bridge](#). We will spend time providing updates on the latest developments with this fourth wave of COVID infections, status of our vaccination requirement, and the Biden "Path Out of the Pandemic" plan, and as always we will answer your questions. And, once again, those who participate in the conversation will have the chance to win really cool TriHealth branded gear! Simply attend the Town Hall and submit your name during the meeting for the chance to win. Prize winners will be announced at the end of the Town Hall, so be sure to stick around!

Today's challenging times will only serve to sharpen our focus and strengthen our resolve to help accelerate our journey in providing better care, better health and better value to those we serve. We will prevail over this fourth and hopefully final wave as we have throughout this pandemic – by working together as One Team, TriHealth Strong, in service to our patients and one another.