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Covid-19, Cold, Flu? What To Know and What To Do

Ryan Cournoyer
January 2022
Mentor - Dr. Staats

Problem Identification

- Helping patients determine if they should be seen by their doctor or if they should isolate to reduce Covid-19 transmission
- Primary care clinics and healthcare providers dealing with unnecessary covid exposures
- Emergency departments overwhelmed by patients with minor symptoms that would be better managed at home in isolation
- Individuals in the community dealing with covid exposures to individuals unaware of symptoms, particularly with omicron variant

Public Health Cost

- In November 2020 Harvard estimated the pandemic would cost the US over 16 trillion dollars, this estimate was made before variants such as Delta and Omicron have continued to wreak havoc.
- A *Nature* review of Epidemiological and economic impact of COVID-19 in the US estimated total economic costs of lost labor and productivity to be estimated at 0.38 trillion, and with the inclusion of medical costs, increases to 1.15 trillion dollars.
- In Vermont there have been a total of 96,412 cases of Covid-19 as of Jan-22, with this current month of January being the highest single month case count yet.
- As 1/19/2022, COVID-19 hospitalizations have reached a new record in Vermont, with 122 patients in the hospital for the, virus (29). Hospitalizations have increased 18% over the last week and ICU numbers have climbed 34% (29-30). A majority of those in both the hospital and ICU are not fully vaccinated. Currently UVMHC is implementing emergency staffing policies due to employee cases and current emergency and inpatient volumes.
- In Colchester where I am rotating, there have been over 2500 cases of Covid-19 since the start of the pandemic.

Community Perspective

- “Parents are struggling with balancing time and resources so when their child has the sniffles, a cough, or a headache some assume it’s just a cold and send their kid to school unknowingly with covid. Covid symptoms like an upset stomach or diarrhea can also be confused with anxiety which many students are also facing.” – Janine Cournoyer 3rd Grade Teacher
- “ Thinking about Covid as a teacher, a parent, and a person with a compromised immune system it all makes me very stressed and scared! I know that my little family of three is doing everything we can to keep ourselves and those around us safe... kids in our schools in our classrooms are not being vaccinated or aren’t taking it seriously, and they are putting our school community at risk... I understand that parents can’t take any more time off and their kids have to be in school, but also I don’t want sick kids in school because I am nervous about getting sick again, and I’m nervous about other people getting sick around me.” – Audrey Osman, Local Elementary School Teacher
- “If you think you have Covid, don’t come in!” – Dr. Christine Staats

Intervention

- Providing easy to digest handout at primary care clinics to educate patients on different symptoms of Covid-19 vs regular URI and Influenza symptoms.
- Use of information dissemination and awareness to prevent Covid-19 patients from coming into clinics, emergency departments and urgent cares unless seriously ill. Preventing exposures both to other patients and healthcare providers.

Results/Response Data

- To be determined, but would like to see fewer positive and potential Covid-19 patients arriving into outpatient primary care clinics
- Hopeful that with increased information available to patients they make informed choices about whether to see a provider in person vs staying in isolation and calling clinic
- Less community Covid-19 transmission due to increased awareness of covid vs cold vs flu symptoms

Evaluation of Effectiveness

- Emergency Department volume and wait times
- Urgent care volumes and wait times
- Number of both probable and positive covid-19 patients arriving to primary care health clinics
- Community spread and cases

Recommendations for future interventions/projects

- Update symptoms and recommendations for additional covid-19 variants and public health recommendations
- Include new treatments and preventative methods as they become available such as further boosters or new vaccinations
- Implement larger scale public health information dissemination

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- Consented: 1/21/2022
- Name: Audrey Osman
- Name: Janine Cournoyer
- Name: Dr. Christine Staats