



UNC Family Medicine Patient Newsletter

December 2021

COVID Vaccines – Safe for Ages 5+! Make sure to get your “booster!”

As COVID hospitalizations are increasing again in North Carolina and with a new COVID variant emerging we wanted to again remind everyone of the safe, effective vaccines that are available for those ages 5 and up! If it has been over 6 months since your last vaccination, we are following evidence-based guidelines and recommending everyone get a supplemental “booster” shot. Getting a “booster” shot has been shown to be very effective at protection from the current COVID variants. Our doctors have seen much unnecessary suffering from unvaccinated people who unfortunately have been misinformed about the overwhelming safety and effectiveness of the available COVID vaccines. We hope that you have been sharing our messages with family and friends on the fence about getting vaccinated. We want everyone to get protected today!

The Pfizer vaccine is approved for ages 5 and up. Today, we have a special question & answer from Sophie Cho, a 5-year-old who attends Burton Magnet Elementary School and who recently got her second Pfizer shot!

Q: Why are you getting the COVID vaccine?

Sophie: So everyone can go back to normal life. Because we don't want to stay sick every day.

Q: What's the first thing you want to do when the coronavirus goes away?

Sophie: Go to Disney World and eat snow cone. Well, only if it's hot.



Sophie Cho, 5-years-old & proud of getting vaccinated, with her drawing dreaming of Disney World.

Mieses Malchuk Discusses Importance of Vaccines for Pregnant Women

In a recent video for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Dr. Alexa Mieses Malchuk discusses how important it is for pregnant women to get fully vaccinated and explains why she got vaccinated and received her supplemental "booster" shot during her pregnancy. Watch the video here: <https://youtu.be/Gc6A0zhCCOQ>



Schedule your vaccine at [YourShot.org](https://www.yourshot.org)! In case you are planning on seeing people during the holidays, remember that full immunity does not occur until at least 2 weeks after the 2nd shot, so take COVID safety precautions like masking, socializing outdoors, and keeping gatherings smaller. As always, contact us in [My UNC Chart](#) or call us with any questions.

Regardless of your vaccination status, our advice is to wear a mask to protect yourself and others!

Let's Talk Health with Drs. Dana Neutze and Niketa Williams



Dr. Neutze

Dr. Williams

Depression

In more ways than one, the past 20 months have been challenging. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic began, it was expected that over half of all Americans would be diagnosed with a mental health condition at some point in their lives. Now, more people than ever – adults and children alike – are experiencing mental health struggles and/or illnesses; events related to the pandemic may have caused increased feelings of sadness, loneliness, fear, anxiety, grief, and other emotions. According to CDC data, from early 2019 until January 2021, the percentage of American adults experiencing anxiety or depression increased from 11% to just over 41%.

With or without a pandemic, this time of year can be really hard emotionally. If you are having difficulties, know that it's okay not to feel the typical "joy" of the holiday season. Please remember that you are not alone, those feelings are not permanent, and there are ways to help you and/or your

children cope in the meantime. It is important to allow yourself to be mindful of how you feel, focusing on what brings you fulfillment or joy, whether that is safely spending time with family and friends, volunteering for a local charity, or doing some other activity. Similarly for children, it is important to recognize their feelings, to keep them safely connected with family and friends, and to establish healthy daily routines that provide a sense of stability.

Major depressive disorder, also known as clinical depression, is more than just a “down” period, or a “slump”; it is a mood disorder that causes ongoing feelings of sadness or loss of interest, with or without feelings of guilt or increased fatigue. Clinical depression can ultimately interfere with day-to-day life and worsen existing problems such as chronic pain or substance use disorder. Depression is a common, treatable illness that you shouldn’t deal with alone; choosing to talk to someone about and/or seek medical treatment for your depression is a strength.

It may be hard to recognize the differences between experiencing an emotional rough patch and being truly depressed, especially since the symptoms of depression often vary between individuals.



DEPRESSION OR JUST A “ROUGH PATCH?”

People can be diagnosed with depression if, for two weeks or longer, they experience depressed mood or loss of interest plus at least four of the following symptoms:

- Persistent sadness (feeling sad, empty, hopeless)
- Loss of interest in pleasure in things you used to enjoy
- Anger, irritability, unexplainable frustration
- Sleep disturbances, insomnia, or sleeping too much (hypersomnia)
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Reduced appetite & weight loss, or increased cravings & weight gain
- Trouble concentrating, or slowed thinking
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Thoughts of death or suicide

ASK YOUR PROVIDER if you are in need of support - YOU ARE NOT ALONE!

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You are not alone

If you have been diagnosed with depression, or think you are experiencing depression symptoms, you don’t have to suffer alone. There are resources to help you manage your mental health and wellness. Depression is not only treatable, but recovery is possible. Family Medicine has our own Behavioral Health team, which you can read about below, that can connect you with resources as well.

- **Talk to your primary care provider.** Your provider is the first stop for your concerns and symptoms, physical or mental. Your primary care provider can assess your needs, help create a treatment plan, and connect you to mental health resources.
- **Find a nearby therapist or psychiatrist.** Many therapists are offering virtual services amidst the pandemic. If you would like to research therapists in your area, try starting with the website [Psychology Today](https://www.psychologytoday.com). You can read more about therapists based on their specialties, and find a good fit for you.

- **Let your loved ones know.** If you feel safe to do so, communicate with those close to you about your depression and mental health. While being depressed may have you feeling isolated, you are not alone!

**If you or a loved one are experiencing thoughts of suicide, please call the free crisis hotline. There are people ready and able to help. 1-800-273-8255 or text CONNECT to 741741*

Behavioral Health Team

UNC Family Medicine offers behavioral health care management, an outreach program designed to help people improve their overall emotional well-being. It is a team-based approach that involves you, your primary care provider, a behavioral health care manager, and sometimes a consulting psychiatrist. As needed, your primary care provider will connect you with your own behavioral health care manager, who will contact you by phone and see you face-to-face in the office to develop a care plan. Services include providing brief mental health counseling, assistance in coordinating your care team, and connecting you with community resources.

****Please note some services may not be covered by insurance – ask your provider.****

UNC Family Medicine Behavioral Health Team

Family Medicine Center at Chapel Hill - Side 1	Outerbanks	 Jaewon Moon MedServe Fellow	 Allie Link, LCSWA Population Health Specialist	 Michael Goodling, LCSW Population Health Leader	
	Sandhills	 Emma DiLamore MedServe Fellow	 Jessica Harper, LCSWA Population Health Specialist		
Family Medicine Center at Chapel Hill - Side 2	Piedmont	 Amare Osei MedServe Fellow	 DeAndrea Crockwell, LCSWA Population Health Specialist	 Destini Warren, LCSWA Population Health Leader	
	Foothills	 Kianna Lawrence MedServe Fellow	 Sarah Grace Downs, LCSWA Population Health Specialist		
Family Medicine Center at Durham and Carraway Village		 Meri Wickenhofer, LCSWA Population Health Specialist	 Jazmin Monroe-Richards, LCSWA Population Health Specialist - Trainer	 Amy Prentice, LCSW Population Health Senior Leader	 Rayhaan Adams, LCSW Director, Population Health & Value Based Care

A message from Dr. Michael Baca-Atlas:



The holidays can be a challenging time. There are added expectations, changes to routines, and stressful family gatherings. It is very common for anxiety and depression to be especially difficult to manage. Often, we can fall into the trap of comparing ourselves to the idealized “Hallmark movie” vision of a picturesque holiday season, and then this pressure we put on ourselves can make it harder to extend compassion to ourselves. We encourage folks to take some time to practice the below techniques to manage depression and anxiety around the holidays:

- 1) Give yourself permission to be “not okay”. You are not alone. This is a difficult time for many people. It is alright to not have the perfect “Hallmark” holiday.
- 2) Take time to practice gratitude. What are thankful for? We can always find something to be thankful for. If you write it down, spend time thinking about it, and allow gratitude to fill you up, you can find contentment – which is a power antidote to the “holiday blues”
- 3) Limit alcohol and drugs. There is temptation to increase use of alcohol or drugs to celebrate the holidays. We know that these chemicals, while perhaps making someone feel good “short-term”, have a “long-term” negative impact on mood and lead directly to depression.
- 4) Focus on getting time outside. Bundle up! Wear your favorite hat or scarf! Go for a walk! Being inside all the time is a part of the reason we sometimes feel bad during the winter months. Getting time outside can be a big immediate mood booster.
- 5) Exercise! Even if it is a brief walk, a short bike ride, an extra lap around the grocery store, or just deciding to stand and stretch. We sometimes decrease our physical activity in the winter – this can lead to a lower mood as well.

Your mental health is always important, but it is especially important to be aware of how your mood is during the holiday season, which is commonly a challenging time. If you have tried all the tips above and still are struggling with depression or anxiety which is affecting your day-to-day life, then it is time to talk with your doctor about what options may be best for you to help treat your mood.

The Patient Advisory Council is recruiting new members!

As part of our commitment to being a certified patient-centered medical home, UNC Family Medicine works hard to include the patient voice in all activities. [The Family Medicine Patient Advisory Council \(PAC\)](#) consists of a group of patients, faculty and staff members. The PAC has a vested interest in helping the Family Medicine Center be the best it can be. It does this by providing input to faculty and staff in clinical processes, research, community health initiatives, and patient communications. We are hoping to recruit new members who are as diverse as the patient population we serve. Would you like to join our team?



If you are interested in learning more about this opportunity, please contact Tim Smith at either tismith@email.unc.edu or 984-974-4996.

Don't forget to get your flu shot!

It's flu season! We recommend flu vaccines for everyone over 6 months old and recommend COVID-19 vaccination for all individuals over the age of 5. Even if you don't get your flu shot from us, there are plenty of other options including pharmacies and certain grocery stores. If you do receive your flu vaccine elsewhere, please let us know in [My UNC Chart!](#)

Please remember the 3 W's as we battle both COVID-19 and the flu virus this winter:

Wear your mask

Wash your hands frequently

Wait 6 feet away from others

Updates from the FMC

Holiday Clinic Schedule:

DATE	FAMILY MEDICINE CENTER	URGENT CARE
Friday, December 24	8:00 AM – 12:00 PM	12:00 PM – 4:40 PM
Saturday, December 25	Closed	Closed
Sunday, December 26	Closed	12:00 PM – 4:40 PM
Monday, December 27	8:00 AM – 5:00 PM	7:00 AM – 8:40 PM
Friday, December 31	8:00 AM – 12:00 PM	12:00 PM – 4:40 PM
Saturday, January 1, 2022	Closed	Closed

Want to keep up with the amazing work our faculty and staff are accomplishing? Follow [UNC Family Medicine](#) on social media!



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