



# UNC Family Medicine Patient Newsletter

January 2022

## A note from the Family Medicine Center

We are working tirelessly to provide the best care we can during this challenging time. Unfortunately, our clinic has been hit with the recent surge in COVID cases, causing staffing shortages. If possible, please consider scheduling a virtual visit instead of an in-person visit, as we would like to prioritize urgent needs for in-person care for the time being.

### An Important Message from the Family Medicine Clinic



- We are sorry for the delays you may be experiencing in reaching us by phone or scheduling an appointment. Like many others, *UNC Family Medicine is facing significant staffing shortages related to this latest COVID surge.*
- Our in-person appointment availability is currently limited. ***We want to prioritize urgent needs for in-person care and help you avoid unnecessary trips to the emergency department.*** We remain open for virtual visits – if you think we can meet your needs in that way, please consider scheduling a virtual appointment.
- COVID testing is in high demand with limited availability. Find options for testing at UNC and in the community here: [unhealthcare.org/coronavirus/testing/](http://unhealthcare.org/coronavirus/testing/)

Instead of coming to the Family Medicine Center or UNC Emergency Department, which are both unable to provide testing for patients without symptoms at this time, please visit <http://unhealthcare.org/coronavirus/testing/> or call your local pharmacy for non-symptomatic COVID tests.

## Mask fit is important to protect from Omicron

As the COVID-19 Omicron variant surges in North Carolina, we'd like to remind everyone how important it is to continue to wear masks to protect those who can't get vaccinated as well as those who are most vulnerable to the virus, such as the immunocompromised, cancer survivors, people who are 65+, and others. It is important to remember with any mask to make sure you wear it correctly and that it fits!

From UNC Health Talk:

"The way your mask fits your face is the most important factor in determining how effective it is," Dr. Sickbert-Bennett says. "You should have a nice fit across the bridge of your nose and underneath your eyes. If you wear glasses with your mask on and you're getting a lot of fog on your glasses, that's a sign that it's not fitting very well."

Read the full article [HERE](#).

**Mask Fit Checklist:**

- Fit your mask snugly against **the sides of your face and over your mouth and nose.**
- Check for gaps by **cupping your hands around the outside edges of the mask.**
- Make sure **no air is flowing from the area near your eyes or from the sides of the mask.**
- You should feel **warm air come through the front of the mask.** You might see the mask move in and out with each breath.

The graphic includes two circular illustrations: the top one shows a person with a blue mask fitting snugly, marked with a green checkmark; the bottom one shows a person with a mask that has gaps, with arrows indicating air escaping from the sides and eyes, marked with a red 'X'.

 [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)

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Even though Omicron is less severe than previous COVID variations, it is easier to transmit from person to person, which is why mask fit is so important. COVID, including the Omicron strain, is still a very dangerous and deadly disease that we can help prevent the spread of!

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

As Omicron surges, COVID is again filling hospital beds and impacting our healthcare workforce in North Carolina. We'd like to 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, especially now. 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!

Out of all Family Medicine Clinic patients, 74% are fully vaccinated, with 76% of those 18 and up, 62% of those 12-17 years of age, but only 12% of those ages 5-11 years old. With that in mind, we’d like to remind you that the Pfizer vaccine is safe and has been approved for ages 5 and up! In case you missed it in December, we had 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.*

**Texts from Family Medicine?** You may be receiving text messages form UNC Health or UNC Family Medicine (image of a phone conversation)



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

**New insurance cards issued for some people in 2022 – make sure to check and update your insurance information!**

It is a new year - time to update your insurance information. Check your insurance card to make sure you have the one issued for 2022. Popular insurance plans that have big changes in their ID number as of January 1<sup>st</sup> include the Blue Cross Blue Shield State Health Plan. Last year's card ID information is now expired in the system. You can make your visit faster by ensuring your new ID number is entered into your account before the day of your appointment. Update your card on [My UNC Chart](#) or contact us in advance of your visit – any scheduler can enter the information. Make sure you have the right card when you make your appointment!

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



*Dr. Neutze*

*Dr. Williams*

### **Cervical Cancer**

In 2021, an estimated 15,000 individuals were diagnosed with cervical cancer in the U.S. ([statistics from Cancer.org](#)). Anyone with a cervix is at risk of cervical cancer, including transgender patients. The main cause of cervical cancer is Human papillomavirus (HPV), a very common virus that is transmitted from person-to-person during sex. Most cases of HPV clear up on their own, but certain strains can sometimes cause cancer.

### **Importance of Screening**

Early stages of cervical cancer have no signs or symptoms, which is why it is important to get routine screenings. And the good news is that cervical cancer can be caught early through screening tests called Pap smears. If caught early, it is very treatable! As Pap smear screening rates have increased in the U.S. over the past thirty years, the number of cervical cancer cases have been reduced by as many as 500,000 ([statistics from NIH.gov](#)).

### **Pap smear**

A Pap smear looks for cell changes on the cervix and can find these cells early before they turn into cervical cancer, when treatment is most effective. Patients should begin getting Pap smears at age 21, and they should continue to get tested every 3 years. Starting at 30 years of age, screening may also include HPV testing, which means someone may only need a pap smear once every 5 years. The risk of developing cervical cancer still exists as people age; cervical cancer is most commonly diagnosed in women who are 35 to 44 years old, with more than 20% of cases found in those over aged 65 years ([statistics from Cancer.org](#)). Because of this, it is important to make sure you are receiving regular pap smears as recommended by your doctor.

GROCERIES ✓

HAIRCUT ✓

CALL MOM ✓

PAP SMEAR

Are you due for a **pap smear**? You can check this box and **prevent cervical cancer!**

A Pap smear is a short and easy type of pelvic exam. Your doctor will use a medical tool called a speculum to examine your cervix and will then use a special brush to collect some cells from your cervix. These cells are then sent to a lab, where they are checked for abnormalities or for the types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer. Again, since cervical cancer can be easily treated if found early, getting screened regularly is very important. If you are concerned about the exam, talk to your provider—they can make sure you feel safe and as comfortable as possible.

### **HPV Vaccine**

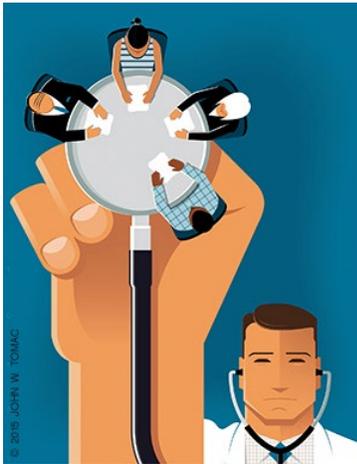
There is also a vaccine that protects against some strains of HPV, thus protecting against cervical cancer! Depending on the patient's age, the vaccine is given as a two- or three-part series of vaccinations usually over several months. Adolescents of any gender should receive this vaccine as early as age 9 to 12 years. Getting the vaccine at 9 to 12 years old is highly recommended, since the vaccine works best at this age to produce a strong immune response to fight off HPV. Additionally, the HPV vaccine can only prevent HPV if given *before* someone is exposed to the virus, meaning that it is best to get your child vaccinated early. We consider the HPV vaccine a part of routine vaccinations for adolescents 11-12 years old. Older patients can still get this vaccine covered by their insurance until the age of 26. The vaccine has shown to be effective in people aged 27-45 years, but whether it is covered by your insurance may vary.

If you have questions or concerns about the HPV vaccine, your provider would be happy to discuss them with you!

### **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](mailto: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

### December Patient Newsletter

***We had reports that the December newsletter did not make it to some people, so in case you missed it, here's the December "Let's Talk Health" and a feature on our wonderful Behavioral Health team!***

### 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%.

Regardless of the pandemic, the winter months can be isolating emotionally. Many of us feel a 'post-holiday letdown' and this is completely normal. Between the onset of cold weather and the reduced hours of sunlight, it's normal to feel a little down. 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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Family Medicine

### **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](#). 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	 <b>Jaewon Moon</b> MedServe Fellow	 <b>Allie Link, LCSWA</b> Population Health Specialist	 <b>Michael Goodling, LCSW</b> Population Health Leader	
	Sandhills	 <b>Emma DiLamore</b> MedServe Fellow	 <b>Jessica Harper, LCSWA</b> Population Health Specialist		
Family Medicine Center at Chapel Hill - Side 2	Piedmont	 <b>Amare Osei</b> MedServe Fellow	 <b>DeAndrea Crockwell, LCSWA</b> Population Health Specialist		
	Foothills	 <b>Kianna Lawrence</b> MedServe Fellow	 <b>Sarah Grace Downs, LCSWA</b> Population Health Specialist		 <b>Destini Warren, LCSWA</b> Population Health Leader
Family Medicine Center at Durham and Carraway Village		 <b>Meri Wickenhofer, LCSWA</b> Population Health Specialist	 <b>Jazmin Monroe-Richards, LCSWA</b> Population Health Specialist - Trainer	 <b>Amy Prentice, LCSW</b> Population Health Senior Leader	 <b>Rayhaan Adams, LCSW</b> 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.

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



UNC Family Medicine

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The logo for UNC Health Care Family Medicine. It features a stylized white building icon to the left of the text. The text is arranged in three lines: "UNC" in a large, bold, serif font; "HEALTH CARE" in a smaller, bold, sans-serif font; and "FAMILY MEDICINE" in a smaller, bold, sans-serif font, separated from the line above by a thin horizontal line.

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