



## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Larry Hogan, Governor · Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor · Dennis R. Schrader, Secretary

July 12, 2021

### Behavioral Health Administration

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Dear Behavioral Health Partners:

As summer gets into full swing, many of us are planning vacations and thinking of ways to fill our children's days with activities and entertainment now that the school year has ended. Please continue to be vigilant in following the CDC guidelines, and Maryland's recommendations to have a safe enjoyable summer season with family and friends.

To help keep our families mentally well, we need to keep ourselves mentally and physically well. Modeling good habits and setting up a healthier environment is important to help ensure our families safety and wellness. COVID-19 has presented many challenges and has increased levels of anxiety and stress on all of us. For those of us who are caring for children, please remember that our children have been and continue to be equally affected by the stressors of the pandemic. If a child in your life is experiencing severe emotional distress, do not forget that there is help available. I encourage you to revisit our [Student and Young Adult Resource Guide for Coping with COVID-19](#) for more information. I also encourage you to strongly consider getting your children 12 years and older vaccinated, for their health and safety and for your families' peace of mind.

As we know, **vaccine hesitancy** continues to be a significant barrier in our efforts to fully protect ourselves and our communities, we have provided several webinars on this topic. On June 11, we provided our latest webinar to help providers encourage individuals to get vaccinated. We discussed the latest information on the vaccines and how to effectively communicate with those who are vaccine hesitant, including those unsure about the severity of the pandemic. You can view this and other archived presentations below and on our [BHA Covid Response webpage](#), where you can also find short vaccine hesitancy webinar video clips:

- March 30: [Addressing Vaccine Hesitancy that You, Your Colleagues, or Those in Your Care May Have](#)
- April 26: [Strategies for Providers to Increase Vaccine Uptake](#)
- June 11: [Updates on the Vaccines and Vaccine Hesitancy](#)

As of June 20, the vaccination rate for Marylanders in the Public Behavioral Health System (PBHS) has reached 31% for people 12-years-old and older. This is a 47.6% increase above the vaccination rate in late May. Though this is a figure that is not keeping pace with the total vaccination rate for the general population, it is in excess of the 25% who get their annual flu vaccine. Your efforts are making a difference. Thank you! We must continue to keep our foot on the gas to reach the roughly 100,000 i

## June-July Monthly Communication to BH Partners

individuals who use the PBHS and remain unvaccinated and vulnerable to infection, complications and death from COVID-19 and its variants. If you have not been vaccinated, please get vaccinated and help those in your care get vaccinated as well. Only together, can we make a difference. The provider alert, [How to Increase COVID-19 Vaccination Acceptance Rates](#), discusses how providers can become vaccinators themselves, or work to host vaccine clinics in partnership with a pharmacy or mobile clinic. Making vaccination a one-stop process, located on-site where someone is already receiving care from a trusted source, is critical for getting more of those we serve vaccinated. If you as a provider cannot host a vaccine clinic or become a vaccinator, [covidvax.maryland.gov](https://covidvax.maryland.gov) is a vaccination resource for those in your care.

While there is no cure for COVID-19, **monoclonal antibody treatment** (mAb) is effective and remains available. [Resources for professionals](#) and [mAb FAQs](#) are updated weekly. If you have patients at high risk for developing severe COVID-19 disease, please encourage them to contact their primary care provider for a referral. If your patient does not have a PCP, there is information about how to gain access to treatment.

As you will note, we are introducing a new format for our monthly updates. I hope you find the attached format more concise, user-friendly and informative. We welcome any feedback you would like to offer. You may email [ivajean.smith@maryland.gov](mailto:ivajean.smith@maryland.gov).

We did not send a communication last month; however, we want to acknowledge that June was Pride Month. Many individuals in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) community struggle with mental health issues, particularly those who are young and/or identify as bisexual and transgender. We must continue to work to ensure that behavioral health services are accessible, affirming, and welcoming to those who self-identify as LGBTQ, if we are to achieve our goals of an equitable healthcare system. We thank you for your partnership in our efforts to bring us closer to behavioral health equity.

Finally, I want to thank you for your support and encouragement, especially over the course of the last month, in the passing of my father. I am so grateful to be a part of this behavioral health community which continues to demonstrate your sensitivity and compassion daily. With this type of partnership, I am confident that our behavioral health system will continue to work diligently to meet the needs of the citizens of Maryland.

Sincerely,



Aliya Jones, M.D., MBA  
Deputy Secretary Behavioral Health

Attachments