



DHC Interviews: Sarah Moyer, MD on Louisville's Response to COVID-19

Doctors for Healthy Communities is proud to present an interview with Public Health Expert Sarah Moyer, MD, MPH. Dr. Moyer is the director of the Louisville Metro Department of Public Health and Wellness. Her team has been working around the clock for nearly a year to combat the spread of COVID-19 and improve resource awareness within the city. Thank you Dr. Moyer for taking time out of a hectic schedule to share your thoughts.

We're approaching a year of life with COVID-19. How are you and your team holding up? What keeps you grounded as this marathon continues?

SM: My team has been working on COVID-19 on top of their normal duties for almost a year. One of my priorities is their wellbeing. We're setting boundaries on the never-ending work. We're making sure they can keep the community safe by taking time off to recharge and refresh themselves. We're sharing mental health resources and encouraging our staff to use them. But we also have hope because we do see a light at the end of the tunnel – safe, effective vaccines. That light is getting brighter every day as our health care systems are receiving their first doses of the vaccine this week.

Cases of COVID-19 continue to rise in Louisville, much like the rest of the country. What strategies does the Dept. of Health and Wellness have in place to help get the community through a dark and depressing Winter 2020/2021?

SM: We're trying to walk the balance between hope and despair. Some individuals have things to be thankful for – their health, new connections that have been generated as we've come together as a community to fight the pandemic, new appreciation for our essential workers, and normalization of working from home with kids in the background. But too many families have lost loved ones, jobs, incomes or some may have recovered from COVID but are still experiencing lingering health challenges. With the vaccine here, we all need to stay strong for just a little longer. So, we are also trying to convey a sense of hope.

We also continue to work with our partners to ensure testing is available across the community. We have an essential needs plan to make sure people who must isolate have a safe place to do so and essential needs like food and medicine fulfilled. We'll also be working with our partners to ensure an equitable rollout of the vaccine. We will continue to provide the community with timely, fact-based information.

Could you talk about your partners in the community? What groups are you working closely with, and how are those collaborations keeping people healthy?

SM: One of the core values of public health is we can't do it alone. We need everyone in our community. We have a wide range of partners from healthcare systems and medical labs to nonprofit groups, faith organizations, grass roots community organizations and the business community to name a few. I spend a lot of my time fostering community

partnerships. Partnerships are invaluable every day, but they have been even more so during the pandemic. They've helped us provide robust testing, share comprehensive data, reach vulnerable populations with education and resources, and helped us increase flu vaccination rates across the city. I'm very grateful.

What can you tell me about the vaccine progress we're seeing on the national stage? What are the stages of vaccine distribution, in Louisville, Lexington and across the state?

SM: Vaccine distribution in Louisville will align with the phased approach that will take place across the state in accordance with the Kentucky Department of Public Health (KDPH). The Louisville Metro Department of Public Health and Wellness, in partnership with the KDPH, will focus all initial efforts of vaccine distribution on reaching the recommended target groups by collaborating with the local healthcare systems, pharmacies and community partners. The first rollout will be geared towards vaccinating our healthcare workers, first responders and those in long-term care facilities which include those at high risk of exposure to COVID and those at high-risk with underlying conditions.

A second phase for the vaccine will include occupations and populations at higher risk not included in the first group which include incarcerated populations and those that work in those settings. Adults that are of a moderate to high risk not included in the first rollout, and teachers and school staff will be included as well. The last phase of the vaccine rollout will then be for the general population to include those not included in the previous phases of vaccine rollout.

How do we combat misinformation? So many people believe false or harmful things about COVID-19. Is there anything that can be done at the local level to fight these conspiracies?

SM: It will be very important that we reach people through a variety of trusted messengers. We've assembled a Community Vaccine Communications Task Force to make sure we share accurate, timely information, that our messages are consistent, and that we reach everyone in our community. We'll be working collectively to make sure people know the facts and know where to go to get vaccinated.

At LMPHW, we use a variety of ways to share accurate and timely information: we hold weekly COVID-19 updates that are live streamed on Mayor Fischer's Facebook page (Tuesdays at 10a); we send out a Friday COVID-19 News and Alerts newsletter, we also quickly respond to news media inquiries but we also often pitch them story ideas and connect them to other subject matter experts in the community who share the same important information. We keep our [COVID-19 Resource Center](#) updated with the most recent data about cases, trends, and testing information and we regularly engage people through our social media channels (Facebook and Twitter). We also launched the [Stay Strong Louisville](#) campaign. We know the past few months haven't been easy, but our fight isn't over. We need our community now more than ever and we feel the campaign conveys that, encourages people to stay strong and keep fighting, and it also connects them to resources and education.

What initiatives need more public attention? Is there any news or organizations we should amplify?

SM: We will need all hands-on deck to share fact-based information about the Covid vaccine. Physicians, nurses and pharmacists are trusted resources for many. We need them to talk not only to their patients but to the community at large. Getting everyone in the community vaccinated will save lives and help everyone get back to work, reopen schools, get people back to the things they enjoy like sports events, weddings and big family gatherings.

Also, contact tracing. I will say that contact tracing is a great strategy for tracking the spread of COVID in the community and understanding the places that people go and have been in recent weeks. What we see getting misunderstood is when our residents say that they haven't been contacted by the health department when they've tested positive for the virus. We understand that everyone has concerns and wants to do their part in stopping

this disease. With the way COVID-19 has spread at a record pace, the volume of cases we've seen can be difficult to keep up with.

Still, we are constantly hiring and adding more people to our contact tracing team to match that. Despite that, there are still challenges that arise. For instance, there are times where residents don't answer the phone when the health department reaches out to them. That potentially could be a missed opportunity to track a case in a timely manner. When our contact tracers do speak with positive cases, they may not be fully transparent on where they traveled or ventured to while infectious. Location data is another piece of information that helps us out as well. We only know the locations of where people have been if they tell us and provide us the addresses they visited during that time frame as well.

We need contacts to be fully transparent with us about where they've been so we can continue to educate our community on how to protect themselves better and what to look out for. We also encourage people who test positive to not wait for us to call you. You can call our COVID-19 Helpline at 502.912.8598.

Thank you once more to Dr. Moyer for all this useful and insightful information. Please do your part to help the Louisville Metro Department of Public Health and Wellness combat COVID-19. There's an end in sight and we'll get there together.

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