



News Notes

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Geisinger Health Plan: Getting Back to Business

Expert Guidance on Keeping Employees Safe During COVID

Lehigh Valley Business Coalition on Healthcare

The latest on COVID-19 and its impact on business

July 27, 2020

Geisinger

Geisinger Health plan experts encouraged employers during a recent webinar to develop layered plans of protection to safeguard their employee’s health and reduce the spread of COVID-19. Jaewon Ryu, MD, JD, Geisinger President and Chief Executive Officer; Allison Hess, Vice President of Health and Wellness; and Kurt Wrobel, President, Geisinger Health Plan and Executive Vice President, Insurance Operations, offered the suggestion during the July 27th webinar presentation Getting Back to Business. The educational event was sponsored by Geisinger Health Plan.

“The whole approach to getting back to work is sort of like cottage cheese,” Hess said referencing a colleague’s analogy. “If you have one layer of cottage cheese, there’s still holes in it; there’s still ways for the virus to get through. As you layer on more layers of swiss cheese, the more you can plug up those holes and mitigate risks.” She stressed that employees should do symptom checks and if they have symptoms or feel ill, they stay home and see their primary care physician.

Recommendations to provide layered protection:

- Continuing social distancing (six feet between employees) at workstations.
- Educating and providing signage.
- Avoiding non-essential travel.
- Continuing work from home where possible.
- Following Centers for Disease Control and Pennsylvania Department of Health guidance for cleaning.
- Managing and monitoring exposures with contact tracing and appropriate follow-up.
- Highlighting digital solutions for healthcare services.

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In addition, Dr. Ryu urged employers to require employees to get the flu vaccine, saying, “The one-two punch of flu and COVID is really a bad combination.” Hess suggested employers find ways to make it easy for employees to get the vaccine, such as having it available on site, and also consider how they would ensure employees who work from home would be vaccinated. Wrobel encouraged employers to provide the vaccine at no cost, given the effectiveness of the flu vaccine in helping to reduce absenteeism and lost production.

In regard to a COVID-19 vaccine, Dr. Ryu said it was likely that we will have a vaccine early next year but that it might take a little longer until it would be widely available. He warned that because it is not clear how long the vaccine’s protection would last, employers should not expect that its availability would necessarily mean that we can return to business as usual. Rather, employers should expect to be coping with COVID-19 precautions for a quite a while.

As of late July, the census of COVID-19 patients at Geisinger hospitals had continued to hover around 15 patients, but the number of newly diagnosed cases had increased from about 16 per day to about 25, a reminder that the virus is still in our community. About 6% of those tested at Geisinger are positive. These indicators show that our community is nowhere near achieving “herd immunity,” meaning that a significant amount the community has had the virus and it has begun to die out.

Until we reach herd immunity or have an effective vaccine available widely, individuals should avoid large gatherings, stay six feet apart, practice aggressive hand hygiene and mask. A simple cloth facemask can block over 95% of droplets even tiny ones from being inhaled and being spread.

Geisinger offers several resources to help employers create a safe workplace for employees and customers. In fact, health plan representatives will go to the work site of health plan members, meet with employers and help them develop a plan. In addition, on its website Geisinger offers virtual town halls and free toolkits for all employers.

The panel also addressed the affect the economic downturn has had on both employers and individuals. To help employers affected by COVID and the shutdown, the Geisinger Health Plan has extended premium payment deadlines for employers who have needed a little more time, Wrobel said.

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Special services provided during the COVID period include:

- Eliminating cost sharing for COVID testing and treatment for inpatient, in-network services through September 30.
- Eliminating cost sharing for telemedicine services through September 30.
- Working closely with our employer groups and members on premiums.
- Accepting credit card payments for employer groups.

For individuals, Geisinger has an emergency food distribution program and has implemented a discharge transportation program, which has provided more than 200 rides. In addition, the health system has developed a website called Neighborly that lists more than 8,500 programs searchable by zip code.

“The Neighborly website has been a home run,” Dr. Ryu said. “It’s basically like having an army of social workers at your fingertips by simply accessing the website.” The information is kept up to date and brings a repository of resources to help people during these times when many people’s lives have been upended.

Geisinger, which is headquartered in Danville, is committed to northeast and northcentral Pennsylvania. This – and the fact it is affiliated with a health system – differentiates its health plan from others. While it provides financial protection, it also offers clinical solutions for employers and their members.

Dr. Ryu added, “I think the combination allows us to get the right focus on prevention and takes a wholistic view around a person to make sure we’re doing what we can to keep them healthy, out of the emergency rooms and out of the hospitals. That’s been especially true during this pandemic. I think it’s been validation of what we always suspected, which is when you have the insurance and care delivery area together, you can focus on communities and populations and the whole individual.”

For additional information, please contact: the Geisinger Health Plan Employer Care Team at 833-901-0059 or employerhelp@thehealthplan.com.

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ABOUT JAEWON RYU, M.D., J.D.



Dr. Jaewon Ryu is Geisinger's president and chief executive officer. Throughout his Geisinger career, he's been a driving force for innovative programs, such as Geisinger at Home and 65 Forward. His background is in emergency medicine, with leadership roles at Humana, University of Illinois Hospital & Health Sciences System and Kaiser Permanente. He's passionate about improving health outcomes and making care easier to access and easier to afford. His drive to improve patient experience earned him a spot among Modern Healthcare's 20 Most Influential Clinical Executives.

ABOUT KURT WROBEL



Kurt Wrobel is Geisinger Health Plan's President and Executive Vice President, Insurance Operations for Geisinger. In addition to overall direction for the organization, he is responsible for budgeting, pricing, trend analysis, forecasting, provider contracting and analytics for all product lines. Before joining the Health Plan in 2014, Kurt worked for the Milliman management consulting company and was the Vice President, Large group Pricing/Underwriting and Chief Underwriting Officer for Humana.

ABOUT ALLISON HESS



Allison Hess is the Vice President of Health Innovations for Geisinger. She has been part of the Geisinger family for 13 years and is responsible for the oversight and implementation of health and wellness programs for Geisinger patients and insured members, employees and community members. She started her career in community health education/corporate wellness and has expanded her responsibilities to include community-based population health initiatives driven by data analysis and clinical outcome measurements. She has been the recipient of several awards focused in various areas of health including health equity, worksite wellness and supply chain. She has also been recognized nationally for her work with the Fresh Food Pharmacy program.

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