February 2021

Dear UCP Heartland Friends,

What a year it has been. It is hard to remember February 2020, COVID-19 virus was at the beginning stages in the US and the amplification of fear and uncertainty was spreading rapidly. The impact of this virus on our lives, our activities, and our sense of freedom has affected us all. It also has been disappointing to see a public health crisis be so politicized, but it has and hopefully we realize this does more damage than good. This week, the death toll from COVID-19 reached 500k in the United States and we all mourn this tragic loss of life. There seems to be better days in front of us and it is my hope that we all understand the responsibility is ours, as a community, to help stop this virus. Which leads me to what I believe is an important part of the process…...a safe and effective tool to help us do that—**COVID-19 VACCINES.**

I will begin this subject by stating that UCP Heartland and/or I are not experts. However, I do believe it is important to get trusted, factual, science-based information to the community and our stakeholders to provide education about the vaccine.

Studies show that COVID-19 vaccines are effective at keeping you from getting COVID-19. Experts also think that getting a COVID-19 vaccine may help keep you from getting seriously ill even if you do get COVID-19.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), COVID-19 vaccines teach our immune systems how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19. It typically takes a few weeks after vaccination for the body to build protection (immunity) against the virus that causes COVID-19. That means it is possible a person could still get COVID-19 just after vaccination. This is because the vaccine has not had enough time to provide protection. Also, if you are vaccinated against COVID-19, you may still be exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19. After exposure, people can be infected with or "carry" the virus that causes COVID-19 but not feel sick or have any symptoms. Experts call this "asymptomatic infection."

For this reason, even after vaccination, we need to continue using the safe and healthy protocols as we learn more about how COVID-19 vaccines work in real-world conditions:

- Wearing a mask over your nose and mouth
- Staying at least 6 feet away from others
- Avoiding large crowds
- Avoiding poorly ventilated spaces
- Washing your hands often

Millions of people in the United States have received COVID-19 vaccines, and these vaccines have undergone the most intensive safety monitoring. I know there are a lot of questions, concerns, and uncertainty about the vaccine, specifically around how quickly it was approved.

The CDC has developed a new tool, **v-safe**, to help us quickly find any safety issues with COVID-19 vaccines. **V-safe** is a smartphone-based, after-vaccination health checker for people who receive COVID-19 vaccines. Learn how the federal government is working to ensure the safety of COVID-19 vaccines.

We at UCP Heartland have been fortunate enough to provide 75 vaccines to staff and clients. The feedback has been great so far and we are looking forward to the day 100% of our staff and clients are vaccinated. I am confident this day will come soon. I am also hopeful that our community members at-large continue to educate themselves, advocate for equitable access to fellow Missourians, do our part in get back to some sense of normalcy…..even if it is a bit different than it was before.

As always, thank you for your support of UCP Heartland and believing the individuals we are so honored to serve.

Sincerely,

Clint