

# ASK THE EXPERT



## Lorna K. Fitzpatrick, MD

Dr. Lorna K. Fitzpatrick is the Vice President of Medical Affairs at Excellus BCBS. She is Board Certified in Pediatrics and Pediatric Hematology-Oncology and obtained her medical degree at Jacobs School of Medicine, Buffalo and continued on to Residency in Pediatrics at St. Louis Children's Hospital/ Washington University St. Louis. She completed a Fellowship in Pediatric Hematology-Oncology at Johns Hopkins University.

### **COVID-19 Vaccine & Boosters: When Will The Pandemic End? Will We Always Need Boosters?**

Information about the COVID-19 pandemic seems to be changing daily, and it's often hard to understand everything we read and hear. We sat down with Dr. Lorna Fitzpatrick to get answers to some of your most asked questions.

#### **Q. Dr. Fitzpatrick, we keep hearing talk about the COVID-19 pandemic becoming an "endemic." What exactly does that mean?**

- ✔ **An endemic happens when a virus begins to spread less, and in ways we can predict – kind of like the seasonal flu.** But it doesn't mean it fully goes away. While talk of an endemic sounds promising, it's important to know that with COVID-19, we aren't there just yet. Researchers still can't tell how the virus changes form. Continuing to focus on Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommended preventive measures such as vaccinations and masking can help us move toward an endemic stage.

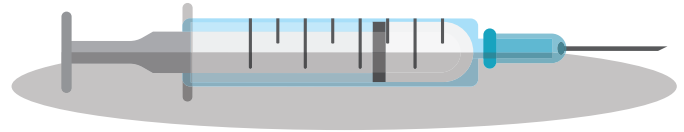
#### **Q. We are hearing about a lot of vaccinated people who still come down with COVID-19. Why should people get vaccinated and boosted if they can still get sick?**

- ✔ **We know that being vaccinated and boosted helps to lower your risk of getting and spreading the virus.** If you do come down with COVID-19, research shows vaccines will protect you from a serious illness, hospitalization, and even death. Since we don't have a way to tell who will have a mild or severe case, being vaccinated is a very important form of protection.

#### **Q. Dr. Fitzpatrick, a question a lot of people have is, will we always need boosters?**

- ✔ **That is a great question, and right now we just don't have that answer.** Viruses constantly change, or mutate, and COVID-19 is no exception – as we have learned from the recent Delta and Omicron strains. Since these changes occur over time, it's important to stay current with the CDC recommendations and currently that includes a booster shot for every vaccinated person age 12+. If you are unsure of when you are booster eligible, reach out to your doctor or pharmacist.

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## Q. Now that mask mandates are being lifted should I continue to wear one even if the place I am going doesn't require them?

- ✔ **If you have a compromised immune system, it's a good idea to continue to wear a well-fitting mask in all places, even if you have been vaccinated.** But, as masks mandates are lifted, the best advice is to do what you feel is safest for you and your household.

## Q. Nearly everyone can agree that the pandemic has taken a toll on their mental health. Dr. Fitzpatrick, what advice do you have for people who are having trouble coping with ongoing sadness or anxiety?

- ✔ **First, let me stress that you are not alone.** All of us need help when going through tough times, and that is ok! Talk with family and friends or a provider about your feelings – you may be surprised to hear they feel the same. Excellus BCBS members have many support resources available, including access to licensed therapists and psychiatrists. Many offer telehealth options. Learn more about care options on our website.

## Q. It's been hard for some of us to keep up with overall health needs because going places felt a little scary. What advice do you have for people who have avoided certain in-person medical visits?

- ✔ **At the start of the pandemic many people, understandably, put off non-critical health appointments out of fear of getting sick.** We know that many are still not current with these appointments. It's safe – and important – to get back on track with all recommended preventive health screenings and dental visits. Call your provider today to schedule these appointments – many may be booking a few months out.

The information in this document is current as of March 16, 2022. For the latest information on COVID-19, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention online at [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)  
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