


Hi Everyone,

Today's update about where we're at here at CCS regarding opening up, masks, vaccinations, etc. I know it's on your mind. It sure is on ours, too

First off – I hope you're doing ok. This has been an exhausting year and while most of us are glimpsing some freedom on the horizon, others are worried that the horizon is *too* close – and we need to wait longer. Regardless of your position, most of us are noticing that with the end of this period of the pandemic comes a deepening realization

of our astonishing level of total exhaustion – and strength . In many ways this next period will be a hard transition – the guidance is confusing, the re-opening brings nervousness, and our understanding of what we *can do* and what we *should do*.

*This email is not to tell you about any changes that CCS is making – it's to share with you that the process is unique to us (and to the world) and that we're very cautiously and hopefully approaching the next steps.*

**Why is this so confusing?** Because CCS is *both* a community-based service organization AND a healthcare provider. That makes our role in this transition unique. Throughout the pandemic we have erred on the side of extreme caution – wanting to keep people in services, staff, families, providers – safe. Every week since the start of the pandemic – and often *every DAY* – we have met to look at policies and recommendation to keep people safe. I think our caution has been well placed and well needed. **Every day I thank the stars that I work with the best folks anywhere!**

I wish that opening was just taking all that we did and putting it in reverse – but we won't get off that easily, will we? Right now the guidance for being in the community is different than it is for healthcare workers. While we are trying to keep everyone safe we also have to take into consideration: People's need to "get back to their previous lives", where there are still risks, protecting peoples personal health information, paying attention to stigma, and considering how the guidance is changing – often on an individual basis – throughout the state. As we've said recently, **we are staying in line with guidance for healthcare workers.** For many of you this is good news, and for others it's understandably frustrating. *Bridging so much conflicting guidance can't make everyone satisfied.*

#### **How does vaccination status effect this?**

- Taking masks off, where we can go and how close we can be to each other, is more and more based on vaccination status.
- People in services: **We continue to gather information on each person served by CCS so we know their vaccination** status – first shot, second shot (if needed) and two weeks after – we want to know where everyone is at. We are required to have this information because we are a Medicaid provider.

- Staff – **We have happily provided every opportunity for each CCS staff to schedule, access and recover from (if needed) their vaccinations.** We have encouraged everyone who is able to be vaccinated to do so. We have asked staff to provide us with their vaccination status, and we continue require that everyone working at CCS wear a mask and maintain social distancing when possible. As Vermont approaches the golden 80 percent vaccination rate (YAHOO!) this part of our current approach will be looked at very carefully. The state is reevaluating their guidance for us, and we will continue to look to our health and service partners for what they're doing to move into the next phase. Staff's vaccination status may come into consideration as we move forward – perhaps influencing who needs to wear masks and who doesn't. We won't be making up those rules – we will fall inline with other healthcare providers and state guidance.

We don't want to take masks off and be too close to each other too quickly. And, we want to also be able to experience the freedom of not using masks when the risk is well managed, reduced- even – nonexistent. We're getting there.

So, as always, more to come.

*Beth*

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