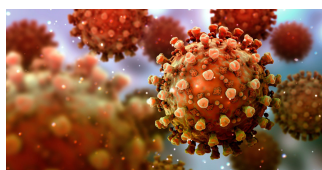


This is the latest in a special series of UUPconnect issues dedicated to sharing important coronavirus-related information with UUP members. If you have questions or comments about items in this newsletter, please email them to UUPConnect@uupmail.org.



COVID-19: The Numbers

These are cumulative numbers collected since the start of the pandemic. The numbers in parentheses are increases since Dec. 4:

New York

743,242 confirmed cases in New York state (up 69,149 cases)

35,266 total deaths (increase of 491 deaths)

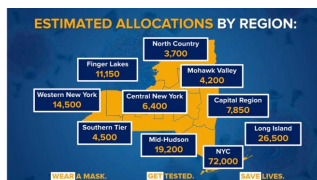
U.S.

15,632,336 cases in the U.S. (up 1,482,566 cases)

292,382 deaths (increase of 15,976 deaths)

Globally, more than 69.7 million cases; 1.58 million deaths

From *Johns Hopkins University* as of Dec. 11



Vaccine coming to NY next week

At long last, a vaccine for COVID-19 is coming to New York—possibly as soon as this weekend.

The state is set to receive 170,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine, approved by the FDA Thursday, in the next few days, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said at a Wednesday press briefing. The doses will be given to high-risk health care workers and workers and residents at nursing homes.

New York City, according to Cuomo: Long Island (20,000 doses), the Mid-Hudson area (19,200 doses), and Western New York (14,500 doses) will get the bulk of the remaining vaccine doses.

The Finger Lakes will get 11,150 doses, followed by the Capital Region (7,850 doses), Central New York (6,400 doses), the Southern Tier (4,500 doses), Mohawk Valley (4,200 doses) and the North Country (3,700 doses).

Essential workers and the public will be able to get the vaccine as future batches are sent to the state. The federal government will ship 6 million doses to states upon FDA signoff on the Pfizer vaccine; half will go out immediately, with the other half going out 21 days later. People must get two doses to become immune.

To see your estimated place in line for a vaccine, click [HERE](#) to try this interactive feature from the New York Times.

Cuomo said the state has 90 regional distribution centers that can store the vaccine, which must be kept at subzero temperatures.

The distribution of the vaccine comes as the state faces a strong second surge of the coronavirus pandemic. According to state data, New York's statewide positivity rate was 5.15 percent on Dec. 10, one of the lowest in the country but much higher than just a month ago. More than 5,100 people were hospitalized with COVID-19; 994 people were in the ICU and 539 were intubated.

The governor today announced that indoor dining in New York City would be shut down starting Dec. 14 to stem the spread of coronavirus. He also said that gyms and salons in coronavirus orange zones can begin operating with reduced capacity and weekly testing.

The state's red, orange and yellow cluster zones all carry extra rules meant to slow spread of the virus in areas seeing spikes. Click [HERE](#) to see if your home or workplace is in a cluster zone.



Upstate nursing college helps students through a tough time

The coronavirus pandemic has posed special issues for the Upstate Medical University College of Nursing, whose graduate-level students are already working in clinical settings all over the state.

"It's been a challenging time for us," said Melissa Carr Rowe, a UUP member and director of operations at the

of their time. So most of them, in addition to their responsibilities as a student, have been working through the pandemic as a registered nurse, as well.”

The college has 700 affiliated sites around the state where nursing students can fulfill the clinical hours of their program. But many of those sites had to reduce staff density to reduce the risk of spreading the coronavirus among patients and practitioners. And that meant that some students might not be able to fulfill their clinical requirements.

The nursing college’s faculty began to work with the Upstate administration and the New York State Department of Education to revise certain clinical components, so that students would not be penalized for a situation that was entirely out of their control.

For example, Rowe said, when students were not allowed to be in treatment settings, they were allowed to do alternative clinical hours on assignments such as screenings of patients.

Rowe said the faculty, with the help of the administration, did an admirable job of solving a potentially tricky situation for their students. The results were even more impressive given the small size of the college—which has 16 faculty members and four support staff—and the ongoing and time-consuming challenges of working remotely.

Add to that the fact that some students were personally affected by the pandemic, when they either had to quarantine, or learned that a family member was ill with the coronavirus, and the challenges became even greater.

Rowe is not surprised that her colleagues at the college worked this out so well, but she is very impressed.

“Our students have really been the bridge for us through this,” she said. “It is so much more complex now, and I feel we carry more responsibilities, and we know our students so much better than we did.”



Cortland Chapter gives back

The Cortland Chapter’s annual **Holiday Season Food Bank drive** was its most successful holiday food collection.

Donations were dropped at the homes of Cortland Chapter retirees Jo Schaffer and Henry Steck between

"Many of you were extraordinarily generous and thoughtful in your anonymous contributions," Schaffer wrote in a story on the Cortland Chapter's website. "Some donated mittens and gloves, hair products, plush toys, games and much more than cans of beans and tuna, boxes of cereal and spaghetti. These contributions will make some families enjoy moments of joy beyond the necessity of food."

The chapter worked closely with Catholic Charities of Cortland to distribute boxes of donated food and personal items.



UUP issues pandemic guidelines for spring semester

UUP's recommended guidelines for the spring semester on SUNY campuses expands upon the measures the union recommended for the fall semester—recommendations that SUNY largely adopted once SUNY chancellor Jim Malatras took charge of the university's response in late August.

UUP's spring guidelines reflect how much UUP and SUNY have learned about the coronavirus, including its transmission and the mental health effects of dealing with it. For example, the spring guidelines advise that furniture be placed in rooms in a way that minimizes potential exposure, and they encourage the dissemination of information about counseling and other mental health services to students, faculty and staff.

Click [HERE](#) to read more about the guidelines in UUP's news release.

Click [HERE](#) to read the guidelines and other information about the pandemic on UUP's COVID-19 resources page.

The spring guidelines generated news coverage. Read the Spectrum News story about the guidelines [HERE](#).



Legislative Agenda Town Hall set for Dec. 17

UUP will hold a virtual Town Hall on the union's 2021-22 legislative agenda on Thursday, Dec. 17.

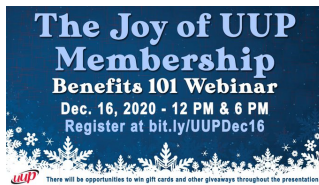
The Town Hall will be held at 6 p.m. Pamela Malone and Carolyn Kube, statewide Outreach Committee co-chairs, will host the event.

legislative agenda, which is expected to be released in January.

"True lasting change can only occur when it springs organically from the people -- that's all of us in UUP!," UUP President Fred Kowal said in a Dec. 11 email message to members. "We need your voice to be a part of our union's call for that change."

Click [HERE](#) to register for the virtual Town Hall.

Members can also submit proposals for the legislative agenda. Click [HERE](#) to send ideas.



Benefits 101 webinars set for Dec. 16

All UUP members are invited to take part in a "Benefits 101" webinar hosted by UUP's Benefits Department on Wednesday, Dec. 16.

Two sessions will be held, at noon and 6 p.m.

The union hosted its first virtual benefits event Nov. 18 and it proved popular with members.

Formatted as a game show, with prizes, spinning wheels and virtual doors to open for answering quiz questions, the webinars were open to anyone in the UUP bargaining unit who wished to learn more about the union's benefits and the best ways to maximize them, whether or not they had signed a membership card. Read UUP's coverage of the events [HERE](#).

Click [HERE](#) to register for the Dec. 16 webinars.



You can spend 2020 HCAA, DCAA dollars in 2021

Health Care Spending Account enrollees will be able to spend money set aside for 2020 in 2021.

So will those who set aside funds for the 2020 Dependent Care Advantage Account.

According to the Governor's Office of Employee Relations, UUP-represented members can use up to \$500 in 2020 HCSA funds, in part because of the many closures and health care cancellations caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The IRS allows for an employer to carry over remaining balances for use in the next year.

800-358-7207 for more information. Email fsa@goer.ny.gov or call WageWorks/Health Equity at 1-800-358-7202 with questions about the extension.

DCAA enrollees have an additional two and a half months to use unspent 2020 funds for eligible expenses in 2021. Claims can be submitted for care provided between Jan. 1 and March 15, 2021; claims must be filed by March 31, 2021.

Click [HERE](#) to check your 2020 DCAA balance or call 1-800-358-7207 for more information. Email fsa@goer.ny.gov or call WageWorks/Health Equity at 1-800-358-7202 with questions about the grace period or your DCAA.



Blood, organ donors needed

There is always a need for blood and organ donations, even during a pandemic.

Please click the links below to see how you can help. Please consider becoming a donor.

- Blood donation: American Red Cross – click [HERE](#)
- Bone marrow: Be The Match.org – click [HERE](#)
- Organ donation: Organdonor.gov – click [HERE](#)



UUP face masks for sale

Now you can promote your union and help fund UUP's annual college scholarships or VOTE-COPE at the same time.

The union is selling stylish UUP face masks and filters; proceeds will go to UUP's College Scholarship Fund or VOTE-COPE. Members purchasing masks can decide which effort they want their donation to support.

The masks, made in the USA, are 100 percent cotton and are machine washable. The filters are also washable.

Dozens of UUP members have purchased masks and their donations have given a boost to the union's Scholarship Fund and VOTE-COPE. So far, more than \$1,000 in mask sales proceeds have gone to the Scholarship Fund; VOTE-COPE has received about \$700.

five more or just the micro. Masks and filters are selling for \$20; the filters are \$10.

Click [HERE](#) to order online.

Click [HERE](#) to order by mail and pay by check.



eLearning is easy with Empire KnowledgeBank

EKB eLearning offers thousands of courses and videos to help employees develop current skills and learn new skills for professional development and advancement.

Empire KnowledgeBank, a UUP-negotiated benefit, also offers courses to help members deal with stress, change, and staying balanced in an ever-changing world.

UUP-represented employees can access thousands of eLearning courses, eBooks and short course videos for opportunities to enhance their professional and career development, for certification preparation and continuing education.

Course offerings include “Bouncing Back with Perseverance and Resilience,” “Take a Deep Breath and Manage Your Stress,” “Optimizing Your Work-Life Balance,” and “Staying Balanced in a Shifting World.”

Click [HERE](#) to apply for a FREE EKB license and to access guidelines.



Help for student loan borrowers as pandemic relief is extended

Student loan borrowers who faced the rapidly approaching end of their pandemic reprieve will have that reprieve extended for another month.

Borrowers had been facing the end of their “pandemic pause” Dec. 31, but the U.S. Department of Education announced last week that the reprieve would be extended to Jan. 31. This effectively passes off this issue to the Biden administration, which is almost certain to address it.

Although Congress is considering a pandemic relief package that both houses hope to pass before the end of the year, there is little information on whether student debt relief would be part of that deal. Because this is a pared-down relief bill, it’s safer to assume that Congress will take up student debt relief later.

loan debt, and UUP and AFT have programs to help people manage their loans.

Last year, UUP started holding clinics on repayment options, with UUP members trained by AFT leading the clinics. The clinics provide members valuable information on how to navigate the many repayment and consolidation choices and how to know if they qualify for federal loan forgiveness, as well as tips on costly mistakes to avoid.

UUP has continued holding virtual student debt clinics during the pandemic. Members interested in having a clinic scheduled at their chapter should contact their chapter leader or the professional organizer assigned to their chapter.

Clinics can be closed to just a chapter or open to members from other chapters, depending on what the chapter wants to do. They can also be tailored to specific populations of members, such as medical residents. The clinics are usually only open to members and are designed for up to 50 participants.

UUP plans to continue the student debt clinics in 2021 and also plans to develop a new group of members willing to become trainers for the clinics. Watch for announcements from your chapter.

AFT offers a free program called “Summer,” to help people work through their student loan refinancing. Summer offers an online student loan management platform and can help borrowers navigate the complex territory of income-driven repayment plans and the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. So far, several dozen UUP members have signed up for Summer.

Read more about Summer [HERE](#).

Read more about the end of pandemic relief [HERE](#).

Read more about UUP’s student debt clinics [HERE](#).



Academics underpaid, overworked: study

Many academics at American colleges and universities are underpaid and overworked— with 38 percent of instructional staff unable to even meet their basic needs, according to a new report from the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice.

For its study, the center surveyed nearly 550 instructional staff members (from four community colleges and one university) in 2019. According to the

insecurity in the previous year, and 66 percent experienced housing insecurity in the previous year. Eight percent experienced homelessness.

The study highlighted other poverty signals, including overwhelming student loan and credit card debt, reliance on public benefits and working multiple jobs to make ends meet.

Click [HERE](#) to download the study.



Please sign New York Youth Climate Leaders petition

The New York Youth Climate Leaders are circulating a petition calling for the passage of [state Assembly Bill A257C](#), which, if approved, would require the governor to publicly disclose all fossil fuel tax expenditures.

The bill also installs a sunset date five years from passage of the bill for the tax subsidies—except for those deemed essential by the Legislature.

You can read and sign the Youth Climate Leaders petition [HERE](#).

UUP recently endorsed House Resolution 763, the Energy Innovation & Carbon Dividend Act of 2019, which would impose a fee on the carbon content of fuels, including crude oil, natural gas, coal, or any other product derived from those fuels, that would be used in a way that allows greenhouse gases to be emitted into the atmosphere. You can read more about HR 763 [HERE](#).

Please sign the petition and share it with others.



Pre-retirement workshops set

UUP is holding a series of virtual pre-retirement workshops.

The two-part webinars will cover health care and Medicare, followed by union benefits, such as dental and vision coverage.

Dec. 14: Health care and Medicare, noon

Dec. 16: Union benefits, noon

Click [HERE](#) to sign up.

Jan. 28, 2021: Union benefits, noon

Click [HERE](#) to sign up.

GET ON THE LIST!

GET ON THE LIST!

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Not on the list? We can fix that

If you're reading this newsletter and it's not being emailed to you, please let us know.

We will fix that problem, toot sweet.

To receive the UUPconnect: Coronavirus newsletter, email UUP Media & Publications Director Mike Lisi at mlisi@uupmail.org. We will add your email to our distribution list.

If your chapter has a coronavirus-related news item or an event, please share it with us so we can share it statewide. Please email your news items to Lisi at mlisi@uupmail.org.

You can email questions and concerns about this newsletter to UUPConnect@uupmail.org.

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