

John Webb, MD, Shad Yasin, Pauline Thomas, MD, Denise Rodgers, MD  
Public Health & Preventive Medicine, Rutgers - New Jersey Medical School, Newark, NJ

## Background

- Public health approaches to homelessness include:
  - providing shelter,
  - delivering protective health services,
  - managing chronic illness, mental health and substance use.
- The COVID-19 Task Force of the Newark Homelessness Commission was promptly convened to address specific challenges created in this vulnerable population by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.
- Ever-changing circumstances required adaptations to standard preventive health strategies and solutions for sheltering.

## Objective

To describe the contribution of a preventive medicine team to this COVID-19 Task Force.

## Methods

- The COVID-19 Task Force of the Newark Homelessness Commission includes the following non-profit and governmental agencies:
  - the YMCA,
  - shelter groups,
  - mental health and substance use organizations,
  - the Newark Department of Health,
  - officials from the Mayor's office,
  - Essex County, and
  - the NJ Department of Health.
- The Rutgers New Jersey Medical School (NJMS) preventive medicine residency program was invited to join weekly meetings in June 2020 to assist with COVID-19 public health strategies.
- Two preventive medicine residents, one medical student, and one faculty member have been working with the group since June 2020.

## Examples of Educational Materials

### TALKING WITH VACCINE HESITANT RESIDENTS

#### 01

##### Use Positive Language

Instead of saying, "Are you taking the vaccine?", try, "Have you taken your shot yet? Let's get you scheduled."

#### 02

##### Understand the myths

Not everyone has the educational background to spot fake science when they see it

Learn what the common myths are and be ready with responses

#### 03

##### Avoid negative language

Be careful not to talk down to residents who are fearful of the vaccine

Resident: "The vaccine was rushed, I don't think I want to get it."  
Staff: "I understand that, a lot of people have that fear. But it went through the same process every vaccine goes through, it just didn't have to wait in line like they usually do."

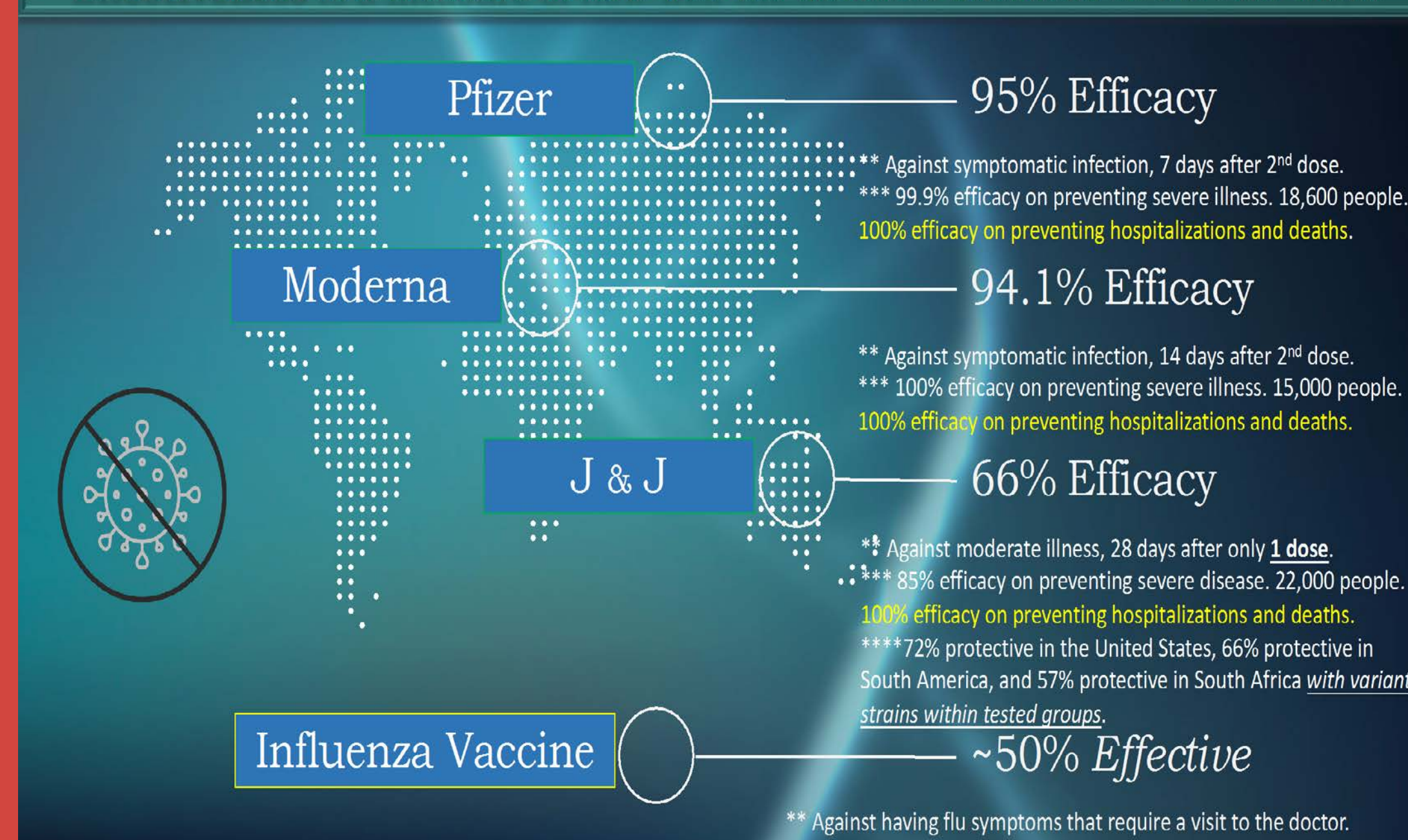
#### 04

##### Understand the dosing and the symptoms

Ensure that residents understand that they are not immune until two weeks after the second dose

Learn the common symptoms and understand that this is the body building its immune response, not an infection

- Efficacy** is a measure of whether an outcome was met in a research study
- Effectiveness** is a measure of how well the outcome succeeds in the real world



## Results

- Preventive medicine team provided guidance and information concerning:
  - Continuous epidemiological data updates,
  - Education on PPE and other infection control protocols,
  - Scientific information on COVID-19 testing,
  - Monitoring illness in congregate settings,
  - Sheltering during cold nights/inclement weather,
  - Equity in care delivery, and
  - Ending homelessness.
- The preventive medicine team also created reports on and crafted work-product and flyers:
  - CDC & HUD guidelines on best practices for shelters,
  - Healthy housing methods in other cities,
  - Custom infographics on hand hygiene and masking,
  - Flyer addressing myths and facts of vaccinations,
  - Brochure for donning and doffing PPE, and
  - Education for staff on vaccine hesitancy conversations

## Conclusion

- Complex social issues require multidisciplinary examination.
- Preventive medicine physicians are uniquely trained and positioned to support teams addressing issues in population health and public welfare.
- COVID-19 has spotlighted the value of expertise in preventive medicine and public health.

As we transcend this public health crisis, the inclusion of preventive medicine expertise in policy and planning for many organizational initiatives will be vital. This casts a guiding light on the significance of inclusion of preventive medicine physicians in not only preventing and mitigating future health crises but addressing wide-ranging social issues that impact pervasive population health concerns such as homelessness, health equity, racism, and global climate change.