A Message from Dr. Van H. Dunn, Chief Medical Officer

Dear Members,

As this issue of *For Your Benefit* goes to press, the federal government has issued an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for a two-dose COVID-19 vaccination developed by Pfizer, with at least two more in line for review. As a result, right now there are tens of thousands of vaccine doses headed for New York City's nursing home workers and residents, with doses for other healthcare workers soon to follow, all of whom can be among the first to receive an approved COVID-19 vaccine.

As you know, healthcare workers are at increased risk of contracting the virus and unknowingly passing it on. We know it has been especially challenging to protect yourself and your family against illness as the flu season and the surge in the ongoing pandemic have collided, creating the potential for a "twindemic" that threatens to pressure our already-stressed healthcare system. So in the same way that I encourage you to get your flu shot every year, I encourage you to get the COVID-19 vaccine when it is available to you.

However, we know many of you have questions about the COVID-19 vaccinations. To help you sort fact from fiction, we have created a COVID-19 vaccine FAQ that you can read on page 5, and view on our website, **www.1199SEIUBenefits.org/vaccines**, which addresses common concerns, like whether the vaccine can give you the virus *(it can't)*, whether you may experience side effects *(you may)* and whether you should continue to wear masks and social-distance after you are vaccinated *(you should)*.

We have heard from some of you that you are concerned about the safety of the vaccines because they were produced so quickly. The rapid development was due to improved efficiencies, such as combining phase 1 and phase 2 trials to assess safety and immune responses, and making major investments in manufacturing capacity to produce large numbers of vaccine doses as trials were still underway. But, like the flu shot, all vaccinations must go through extensive testing and clinical trials to prove their efficacy and safety before they are approved for use. Similarly, a vaccine issued under an EUA must undergo the same rigorous review. For its part, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is charged with determining whether the known and potential benefits of a COVID-19 vaccine outweigh its potential risks. But first, manufacturers submitting vaccines for approval must present safety data gathered from multiple-phased trials, including data on a sample of more than 3,000 vaccine recipients who are followed for at least one month after they complete the course of the vaccine to determine if they experience any side effects (the Pfizer trials had 30,000 participants). In addition, manufacturers must submit proof that they can ensure the quality and consistency of the vaccine approved for distribution.

We know that COVID-19 affects different populations differently, with people of color suffering disproportionately high mortality rates due to the virus. In addition, the elderly and people with underlying health conditions such as obesity, diabetes and chronic respiratory disease are vulnerable to serious complications of the virus. Currently, the federal Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices proposes that the elderly and those with serious health conditions receive the vaccine after healthcare workers, nursing home workers and residents.

The Union has been conducting Tele-Town Halls and your Benefit Funds are hosting webinars to answer your questions about the vaccine—and I am always here for you. And remember to visit our website, **www.1199SEIUBenefits.org/vaccines**, to find the latest information or to ask me a question directly.

Be safe. Be well.

Van H. Dunn, MD
Chief Medical Officer