

COVID-19 Health System Updates

November 11, 2020, Wednesday

If you've been watching or reading the news about COVID-19 over the past week, it can feel as if we're at a crossroads. Some of the news is good; some is concerning. New York's test positivity rate is one of the lowest in the nation, but it is rising. Infections in the region are on the upswing, but hospitalizations haven't gone up by as much. There's potential good news about a vaccine, but concern about what the winter might bring before the vaccine can be rolled out.

Here at Mount Sinai, while our COVID-19 inpatient totals have been flat to a bit up over the past week, the percentage of those patients who are in critical care continues to increase. That is less alarming than it might seem. We are not seeing an increase in acuity among the COVID-19 patients who are being admitted. But within that population, those who are sicker tend to stay in the hospital longer, while those from the recent uptick who were not as sick have already been discharged. So over time, even as cases decline from their peak of a few weeks ago, the percentage of patients in the ICU tends to increase.

While the rise in the ICU percentage may not be something to worry about, the soaring COVID-19 caseloads we're seeing around the country certainly are. Though New York was spared that experience for quite a while, we've now seen increases in the test positivity rate in all five boroughs of New York City and in the larger region, with seven-day moving averages of 1.9 percent for the city, 2.4 percent for Long Island, and 2.8 percent for the Mid-Hudson region. As I said earlier, these rates are lower than in much of the rest of the country. But they're not as low as we want them to be. The best chance to control the epidemic is to keep the rate below 1 percent. So we need to stay alert and aware that COVID-19 is still out there among us, and be even more careful to take the necessary steps to keep ourselves safe.

One thing I want to especially remind everyone about this week is eye protection. If you're seeing patients, for example at the bedside or in treatment or examination rooms, you must wear a face shield or goggles in addition to your other PPE. It's for your safety

and for the protection of your families and your patients. Eye protection is part of our [COVID-19 Code of Conduct](#), along with hand hygiene, wearing a mask, and social distancing. Please take a moment to review it. And please keep practicing these things when you're working, when you're on a break, and also when you're not at work.

As of this morning, we had 94 COVID-19-positive inpatients in our hospitals, 27 of whom were in critical care.

Vaccine Update

You may have seen in the news that Pfizer has reported promising initial results for its COVID-19 vaccine. This is encouraging news. Our vaccine planning committee, led by Chief Pharmacy Officer Susan Mashni, PharmD, is monitoring this and will keep us up to date as Pfizer releases its data and the vaccine moves through regulatory review.

Updated Meetings Policy

We recently updated the Health System [policy on meetings and public events](#). All in-person large group lectures, events, and meetings are still canceled, but in some cases we are now allowing in-person meetings of up to 25 people. These meetings can happen only for essential educational or training purposes that require in-person attendance. Everyone at the meeting must wear a mask and sit at least six feet apart, and absolutely no food or drink is permitted.

Visitation Resumes at Mount Sinai Brooklyn

As of this past weekend, the neighborhood surrounding Mount Sinai Brooklyn is no longer considered to be a red zone, so we are again permitting limited visitation there. Patients may have one visitor per day, and all the other restrictions of our [visitation policy](#) still apply.

Meet Our COVID-19 Scientists

During this pandemic, we have learned a lot about treating COVID-19 patients, and we are passing that knowledge on to clinicians and scientists around the world. Here's an example: an article just published in [Cancer Cell](#) that offers a "road map" outlining four

distinct stages of COVID-19—from viral entry to the multi-organ dysfunction that affects some patients—with specific testing and treatment protocols for each stage.

“Analogous to the way we treat cancer, COVID-19 treatments have to be adapted to the evolution of the disease,” says study author Luis Isola, MD, Professor of Medicine (Hematology and Medical Oncology), and Pediatrics. “Treatments that may be effective early on no longer impact late disease. Conversely, treatments that help patients with advanced disease may not help or be justifiable when they first present with it.”

The road map will help physicians link the right tests to the right interventions, says corresponding author Carlos Cordon-Cardo, MD, PhD, the Irene Heinz Given and John LaPorte Given Professor and Chair of the Lillian and Henry M. Stratton-Hans Popper Department of Pathology, Molecular and Cell-Based Medicine. “We want to give patients a better chance of being cured, based on objective laboratory data and clinical information.” Read more about it [here](#).

With this study, as with so many others, Mount Sinai is leading the way in improving the standard of care for COVID-19. Every day, we get a bit better at this. And with the new vaccine developments, it’s now possible to see an end coming to this ordeal. It’s not here yet, but it’s there, the light at the end of the tunnel. Something to look forward to, and something to work toward.

Our fellow New Yorker, Anthony Fauci, MD, was [honored for his COVID-19 work](#) by his native borough of Brooklyn yesterday. By video link, he told the crowd: “The vaccine is on its way, folks, so hang in there, hang tough. We’re going to get over this together.”

That’s exactly right. We will get through this, together, thanks to every single one of you. Your hard work, agility, compassion, and talent are what will get us there. I am honored to be able to support you in this effort.

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