

COVID-19 Health System Updates, December 9

December 9, 2020, Wednesday

Hanukkah starts tomorrow night. To those of you who celebrate, have a happy holiday, and I hope you take some time to enjoy latkes or sufganiyot during the week ahead.

My update this week won't be a surprise. We are now in the period when the COVID-19 transmissions that occurred over Thanksgiving will be causing symptoms serious enough to send some people to the hospital. And indeed, our COVID-19 patient counts continue to rise steadily, as do the city and state numbers. We expected this, and are ready for it.

You may have seen that Governor Cuomo announced a number of steps this week to help address this latest surge. Among them, he asked all hospitals in the state to increase their bed capacity by 25 percent. This is consistent with our own internal planning, and we are already at work on it. The governor also announced some new metrics, based on available hospital beds, for deciding when to pause indoor dining and other businesses. These metrics could also bring changes in visitation rules at our hospitals. We have not reached that point yet, but I will keep you informed.

As of this morning, we had 253 COVID-19-positive inpatients across the system, 48 of whom were in critical care. The New York State seven-day average test positivity rates as of yesterday were 4.1 percent for New York City, 5.7 percent for Long Island, and 6.2 percent for the mid-Hudson region.

Vaccine Update

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is meeting tomorrow to consider the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. We don't know if they'll act at the meeting or sometime afterward, but it's possible that the Pfizer vaccine could receive emergency use

authorization very soon, and if so, the first doses would arrive here shortly afterward.

The FDA's scientists released [their own assessment](#) of the Pfizer vaccine yesterday. These are career scientists and physicians who are not politically appointed and who are experts in vaccine safety and effectiveness. And they confirmed what the company said in its release last month: that the clinical trials have shown this to be a safe and effective vaccine.

The FDA scientists did say that more than half of the people who took the Pfizer vaccine experienced some mild to moderate side effects, including pain at the injection site, fatigue, and headache, particularly after the second dose. These side effects were generally short-lived, and were less frequent in older adults. I want to be candid about these side effects, so that you're not surprised by them. But please know that it's common to have these types of side effects after a vaccination. They mean your immune system is working and making antibodies like it's supposed to. And I promise you that you cannot get COVID-19 infection from the vaccine.

Our own vaccine planning committee led by Dr. Susan Mashni is putting the finishing touches on our plan to distribute this vaccine. Here is what you need to know:

Clinical and nonclinical staff who work in areas where there are lots of patients who have COVID-19 will be among the first Mount Sinai employees to be offered the vaccine. The exact timing for each group depends on how much vaccine we get and when we get it. You will be contacted when we are ready to offer it to you.

The Pfizer vaccine and the vaccine from Moderna, which the FDA will consider next week, both require two doses. It is extremely important to get both doses in order to get the best protection against COVID-19. When we schedule you for the vaccine, we will make both appointments for you.

When you are offered the vaccine, we really hope you will take it. We believe that it is an important way to protect yourself, your colleagues, your patients, and your

loved ones against COVID-19. The life you save by taking the vaccine may be your own, your parent's, your partner's, or your colleague's. I plan to take it when it's my turn to get vaccinated. But at this time, vaccination will not be mandatory. That may change as the pandemic progresses—and as we get guidance from the federal, state and city public health agencies—but for now, we will **not** be mandating the vaccine.

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines have been tested in tens of thousands of people for two months or more. None of us will be the guinea pigs for these vaccines. They have undergone large and robust studies already.

Here are two other things you should know. We believe that you should get the vaccine even if you had COVID-19 already and have antibodies. While the immune response to COVID-19 appears to be robust, we don't know yet how long it lasts. So the vaccine can help protect you even if you already had it. Dr. Fauci said the same thing [to CBS News](#) this week.

Also, we are asking everyone to continue to wear masks and socially distance, even after you've had the vaccine. We know that the vaccine will prevent most people from getting seriously ill, and dying, from COVID-19. But we don't know yet whether it will prevent you from getting a mild course of the virus and spreading it asymptotically. The clinical trials weren't designed to answer that question. It will also take time to immunize our colleagues and our community. So please be safe and continue to follow our [COVID-19 Code of Conduct](#) even after you've had the vaccine. It won't be forever, I promise. Sometime in 2021, we hope to be back to normal and planning gatherings with our families and friends.

We are continuing to update the [vaccine FAQs](#) on the website, and for a shorter summary, please see the "What You Need to Know" document attached to this email. If you still have questions, please email us at COVIDQuestions@mountsinai.org.

How to Get Your Patients (and Yourself) Tested

I know that many of you who deal with patients directly, in our facilities and on the phone, have been getting questions about how they can get tested for COVID-19 infection. **For patients**, [here](#) is a sheet listing the testing options available to them. This is different than the [employee testing site list](#) I announced last week, which we are continuing to work on expanding.

Respiratory Care Expertise on Call

Just like in wave one, respiratory care expertise is now available on demand, 24/7, via the Respiratory Care telehealth program. Respiratory therapists are available to answer questions about respiratory equipment like ventilators, BiPAP, and high-flow nasal cannulae, as well as to provide guidance for device management based on Health System treatment protocols. To consult a respiratory care specialist, call the Clinical Command Center at 1-800-TO-SINAI (1-800-867-4624) and ask to be connected to the Tele-Respiratory Support Hotline. More information is available [here](#).

Free Coffee at Starbucks

From now through the end of December, Starbucks is offering free coffee to all health care workers. Show your Mount Sinai ID at any Starbucks location to get a free tall coffee.

Dance Video Winners!

We got so many good videos in response to our break room safety contest that we couldn't choose just one. So I'm happy to present the Apple Watches to four teams, one each from Dermatology, Mount Sinai Hospital Ambulatory, Pathology, and Rehab. Each of them had an original, and often funny, take on how to keep yourself safe from COVID-19 in the break room. You can watch the videos [here](#).

I hope you enjoy watching the videos, but I also hope you pay attention to the message. As I said earlier, we are seeing the wave of Thanksgiving infections now, and we can expect another wave to build this month as people gather for Christmas, Hanukkah, New Year's Eve, and other events. Please don't become

part of that wave yourself. You can have a fun time this month while keeping yourselves safe and healthy. Attached to this email is an infographic with helpful tips. It's important that you pay attention to this.

The biggest part of this current wave is just ahead. We can meet it and overcome it, just as we have before, if we work together. But to work together, we need all of you here—healthy, committed, and able to give our patients the care they need. It's our responsibility. It's our mission. It's at the heart of why we work in health care and wear the Mount Sinai badge.

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