

COVID-19 Health System Updates

January 13, 2021, Wednesday

We are now in phase 1B of the COVID-19 vaccination project, and the list of who is eligible for vaccination continues to grow rapidly. Yesterday, Governor Cuomo authorized people between 65 and 74 years old to receive the vaccine, just a couple of days after authorizing those 75 and over and [certain categories of essential workers](#). And we expect that the state will issue additional guidance shortly on the eligibility of those who are immunocompromised and younger than 65.

Meanwhile, health care workers remain the top priority, so I encourage everyone who works onsite at our facilities, and now also those who are working remotely and are age 65 and older, to get scheduled for vaccination.

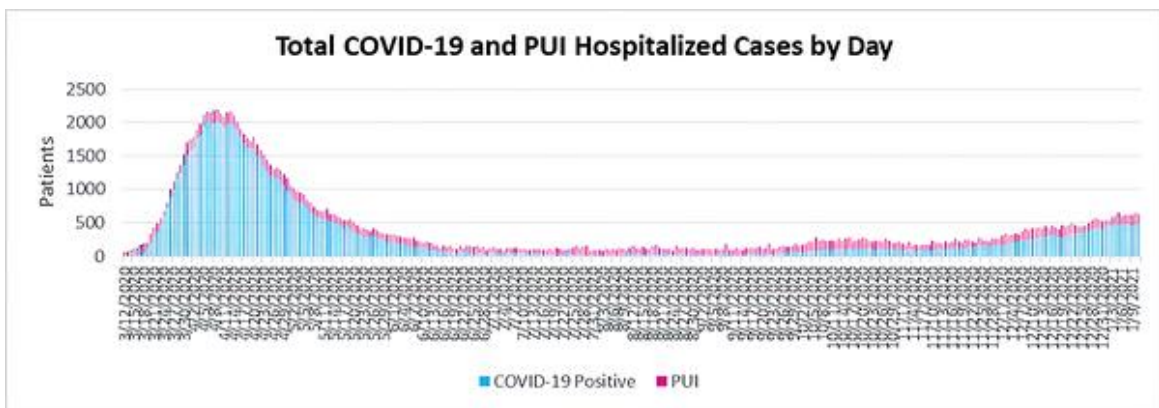
This expansion of vaccine eligibility to members of the public is an important development since the vaccines were first launched last month, and another major step toward ending this pandemic. But exactly what it means for us depends on how much vaccine we receive from the state and the city. This means that, at times, we may need to pause scheduling of members of the public, as the amounts of vaccine allocation that we receive have been and will likely continue to change. We are working to get clarity on that.

Earlier this week, we wrote to leaders and managers across the Health System to ask that staff be redeployed to help run the vaccination pods. Exactly what and how many people we need will depend on the vaccine supply, but in addition to providers who will actually give the vaccinations, we may need to fill a variety of nonclinical roles, including registrars, wellness monitors, and lobby screeners. If you are interested in volunteering for any of these roles, please talk to your manager. If you are asked to redeploy, we are grateful for your cooperation. We very much also appreciate the efforts of everyone who is not redeployed but will now have to cover for colleagues who are. This will be a new challenge for all of us, but I am confident we can meet it.

The response by patients to news that they are eligible for vaccine has been fantastic. Yesterday, we vaccinated about 4,000 people, including employees and patients. We want to offer these vaccines to as many as we can while remaining committed to ensuring that vaccination of our health care workers is our most important goal.

As of this morning, we had 500 COVID-19-positive inpatients in our hospitals, 83 of whom were in critical care. This is the first week since May that we have hit 500 cases, and I want to say a few things about that.

First, even with 500 cases, we are still at only one-quarter of the peak we hit last year. And not only that, this time the curve is much flatter, as the graph below shows. We are seeing steady increases, but not rapid ones. It's likely that everything New Yorkers have learned since March about wearing masks, social distancing, and hand hygiene is really making a difference.



Second, we are treating them much more successfully. Our death rates from COVID-19 are far below where they were in the spring, and that's due to you—all of you—who have learned so much about, and taught the world, how to treat COVID-19. This is why we all got into health care. Every day we are saving lives, and we're still learning more about how to do it.

But I do acknowledge that our current situation adds some significant complexity compared to last spring. We have to set up and run an enormous

vaccination operation even as we treat a higher number of COVID-19 patients and still care for as many of our non-COVID-19 patients as we possibly can. They need us too. It's a challenge, to be sure. But we are turning the tide. And that light at the end of the tunnel grows closer by the day.

An Update on the Travel Policy

If you travel outside New York and our five neighboring states, under updated state rules you must now get tested twice—on the first and fourth days after your return—in order to avoid the mandatory 14-day quarantine. We have updated our [travel policy](#) to reflect this, and as a reminder, here is the list of [employee testing sites](#) where you can get SARS-CoV-2 nasal swab (PCR) tests.

Behind the Scenes

This week, I'd like to spotlight another leader who has been working behind the scenes to keep us all safe: Susan M. Mashni, PharmD, Vice President and Chief Pharmacy Officer, and the head of our COVID-19 vaccine planning committee. In her own words:

I think my most challenging day during the pandemic was in late March: We were running out of sedative medications for our COVID-19 patients, and we'd reached out to the FDA, pharma, our wholesalers, and partners everywhere with a cry for help. We were able to procure some drug to be brought on a Sunday, but our loading dock wasn't available. We didn't realize the issue, and had to deal with it on the spot. The medication was loaded onto the street, and our pharmacy team, including their family members, all came in and helped to move the medication into the pharmacy. It was amazing—all got on board and got it done.

In the last few months, I'm so proud of the great work our multidisciplinary team is doing as we plan every aspect of administering the COVID-19 vaccines. We have to make sure to align with the state and city on the employees and patients who are within the guidelines to be vaccinated. This is

so hard! We want to give vaccine to all, but some will have to wait. It is not personal—it has nothing to do with how much we value our people, appreciate them, care about their welfare, or how vital they are to our Mount Sinai family.

Then there is this issue: The decision to be vaccinated is so personal for many. I want to help everyone get the answers they need from the parties that they respect and understand. Trying to accommodate each of our employees and patients—and give them the personal attention they need and deserve to make the best decision for them—is difficult and tough for our team.

As a pharmacist, I can say that large clinical trials have shown that the vaccines we have so far—from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna—are remarkably safe and effective. I volunteered at The Mount Sinai Hospital vaccine pod last weekend and therefore was eligible for vaccination. I did get vaccinated, and am advising my friends, family, and all who ask my opinion to do the same!

A Note About Your Well-Being

This has been an extraordinarily challenging year for us all, not just in our work lives but in our personal lives as well. In addition to working harder than ever before in a more stressful environment, many have dealt with significant challenges related to child care, elder care, financial stress, and work-life balance. Many have lost friends and family. Others have experienced physical and mental health challenges of our own. At the same time, we have had to restrict some of the ways that we normally cope, such as surrounding ourselves with friends and family.

While our colleagues who provide support to the workforce have made a significant effort to create resources to meet some of these increased needs, we all know that challenges remain. I want to acknowledge these struggles and to let you know that we—this institution and all of us who help lead it—care about you and see you as the people you are. We know that you are more than just the remarkable work you do for Mount Sinai and our patients.

Before and during the pandemic, we gathered, created, and expanded [resources](#) for basic needs and mental health, well-being, and spiritual care. It takes strength to recognize that some of these resources might help you and to take advantage of them when needed. As we move into this exceptionally challenging phase—not just “the end of the beginning” but really, we can now hope, the beginning of the end—please know that you are not alone. You are part of a community that cares about you. I really hope that you will use these resources if and when the need arises.

Every week I tell you how proud I am of the work you all are doing. And then the next week, you go and outdo yourselves. This week is no exception. As we get closer to the end of this terrible ordeal, the work will only get harder. But seeing the end, even in the distance, gives us the strength to go on. Thank you once again for everything. I am proud to wear the Mount Sinai badge alongside some of the most outstanding people in all of health care.

Vicki R. LoPachin, MD, MBA
Senior Vice President
Chief Medical Officer Mount Sinai Health System