

# COVID-19 Health System Updates

October 21, 2020, Wednesday

As our region works its way into further into autumn, COVID-19 cases continue to be elevated compared with the past summer. However, in our own hospitals, the growth in the number of COVID-19 patients has flattened. And in the Brooklyn and Queens hot spots, test positivity rates are decreasing.

That is good news. Additional good news is that, thanks to our Transfer Center and the clinicians and administrators that they work with, we've been able to do a remarkable job of balancing demand and capacity across the Health System. They've been especially helpful at transferring patients out of The Mount Sinai Hospital's emergency room to other locations. This means that even when the overall number of patients across the System goes up, we are able to care for them better. I want to praise everyone involved in this effort, and encourage you to keep up the good work.

I also want to commend everyone who is following our [COVID-19 Code of Conduct](#) and being scrupulous about masking, hand hygiene, social distancing, and self-screening for symptoms. I know there have been some start-up glitches at sites that are doing temperature and attestation checks at the doors, and I appreciate your patience as those are resolved.

My colleagues and I also know that it can be challenging to find a place to eat where you are safely distanced from your colleagues. We're working hard to identify additional spaces at each of our sites that can be used as break rooms, including conference rooms and auditoriums. We're also looking into better staggering meal breaks so that fewer people are looking for a place to eat at the same time. Your site leadership will let you know what arrangements have been made in that regard. It's important to maintain at least six feet of distance from everyone else when you take your mask off to eat. We will do everything we can to help you do that, especially as colder weather arrives and eating outdoors is no

longer an option. Likewise, when you are in break rooms, please make sure to keep your mask on except when you are eating. This will help keep you and your colleagues safe.

While we're seeing some good news out of the hot spots in New York City, COVID-19 cases are rising in New Jersey and Connecticut. Wherever you live—but especially in those states—please be careful when you're not at work to mask, keep a safe distance, wash your hands, and limit your interactions with people outside your immediate household. Your family, your colleagues, and your patients need you to stay safe and healthy.

As of this morning, we had 120 COVID-19-positive inpatients in our hospitals.

### **Planning for a Vaccine**

Although a COVID-19 vaccine is likely a few months away, there's a lot of preparation and planning to do before we can receive and distribute it to our staff and the public. We've established a committee led by Susan Mashni, PharmD, our Vice President and Chief Pharmacy Officer, to ensure that we do all of this safely.

This committee will be guided by plans that Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio are drawing up for storing, distributing, and prioritizing access to the vaccine across New York City and New York State. Those plans are still very preliminary, but we expect that the initial wave of vaccinations would include front-line health care workers in high-risk areas like emergency departments, critical care, and emergency medical services. Other health care workers and those with high-risk conditions will likely be prioritized as well.

Governor Cuomo has also appointed a [Clinical Advisory Task Force](#) that will review every COVID-19 vaccine authorized by the federal government and provide an independent opinion about whether it is safe and effective. One of our own eminent virologists, Adolfo García-Sastre, PhD, is among the seven members.

I know you will have a lot of questions about the COVID-19 vaccine plans, and we do not yet have a lot of answers. But you can email [COVIDQuestions@mountsinai.org](mailto:COVIDQuestions@mountsinai.org) with your concerns, and we will address them as best we can. I will keep all of you updated in these weekly emails, as well.

Finally, I know that it can be hard at times to keep doing what we need to do. Pandemic fatigue is very real, and the news from our neighboring states this week doesn't help. We all want to be able to go out in public without a mask and without worrying about crowds or indoor spaces. I want that just as much as you do.

But remember that we know how to avoid transmitting COVID-19, and we are learning more and more every day about how to treat it. This means that sooner or later, we'll be able to bring this pandemic to an end. And it will be sooner if we all do what we know we have to do now. So wear your mask, practice hand hygiene at every opportunity, observe social distancing, use our [wellness resources](#), and be there for your colleagues. Every day we do this gets us closer to the finish line and decreases our personal and collective risk.

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