

COVID-19 Health System Updates

December 16, 2020, Wednesday

It is probably the most complicated week of this latest surge, at least so far.

We started offering COVID-19 vaccinations to some of our faculty and staff yesterday, yet at the same time, we—including many of the very people who are getting vaccinated—were taking care of the largest number of COVID-19 patients we have seen since the end of May.

It is hope, paired with frustration. It's not an easy combination, especially for those caught in the middle of it. But I am pleased to report that thanks to all of you, and the extraordinary work you do, we are holding our own on both fronts. Hope is winning out. The tunnel is long, but there is light at the end.

While I can't go into too many details right now, I can tell you that we are off to a very good start in vaccinating faculty and staff in our Emergency Departments and others who regularly treat COVID-19 patients or work in high-risk settings. Over the next days and weeks we will continue to offer vaccine to faculty, staff, trainees, and students in these areas, and we will continue to expand the areas included consistent with the New York State guidance. We have created a [Vaccine Information website](#) to help answer your questions; please see the attachment.

We will let each of you know when it is your turn to be scheduled for the vaccine. If your colleague is offered vaccine and you are not, please be patient. We are following a strict process and will get to you as soon as we can. If you are offered vaccination, you cannot give your spot to another person. While that is a very generous impulse, unfortunately we cannot allow it, as that could violate New York State rules and would work against our efforts to ensure a fair and equitable distribution.

We are already planning for the next group and hope to be able to announce those details soon. We also hope to learn soon whether Moderna's vaccine will be granted emergency use authorization and whether, if so, we will be allocated some of that for our staff and patients. That vaccine looks to be as promising as Pfizer's, to judge by the [FDA data](#) released yesterday. Whatever happens next, we will not stop until all of our employees, and then our patients, have the opportunity to receive COVID-19 vaccination.

On the treatment side, our biggest challenge right now is staffing. We have a significant number of nurses and other clinical staff on home isolation due to COVID-19 infection or exposure, which reduces the number available to help care for our growing numbers of patients. We are taking a number of steps to try to address this challenge and are grateful to everyone's agility and teamwork. You can help by continuing to follow the Mount Sinai COVID-19 Safety [Code of Conduct](#), and its masking and social distancing protocols, as strictly as you can.

As I mentioned last week, the state has directed us to increase our bed capacity by 25 percent in order to continue to meet the needs of our surgical patients. I am pleased to tell you that every Mount Sinai hospital is meeting that demand.

As of this morning, we had 305 COVID-19-positive inpatients in our hospitals, 53 of whom were in critical care. The New York State seven-day average test positivity rates as of yesterday were 4.0 percent for New York City, 5.7 percent for Long Island, and 6.1 percent for the Mid-Hudson region. These positivity rates are ever so slightly down since last week. It's too early to call it a trend, but it's another reason for hope.

We don't have any policy changes to announce this week, and I know you're extremely busy, so I'll wrap this up with a thought.

This week, you achieved something entirely new. You treated more than 300 COVID-19 patients at a time while setting up a complicated and robust vaccination operation **and** handling a normal, even busy, surgical schedule and non-COVID-19 medical caseload. You've done each of those things before—in fact, in March

and April, our system treated more than seven times as many COVID-19 patients. But to do all three at the same time is extraordinary.

Time after time, the world has thrown new challenges at you, and you've responded admirably. You've shown again that there is nothing you cannot do. This is why it remains the honor of my life to wear the Mount Sinai badge with you.

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