

COVID-19 Health System Updates, April 14

April 14, 2021, Wednesday

As you've probably heard, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended yesterday that use of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine be paused while reports about a few, extremely rare blood clotting events are investigated. The New York State Department of Health has endorsed that recommendation, and we have paused all use of this vaccine until further notice.

The Mount Sinai Health System was using the Johnson & Johnson vaccine in only a few limited situations: for homebound patients of our Visiting Doctors program; for a small number of inpatients and Emergency Department patients at some of our hospitals; and for the Mount Sinai South Nassau vaccination van, which brings vaccinations to community locations in its service area. The vaccination van will switch to using the Pfizer vaccine for the time being.

In its [announcement](#), the FDA said that six cases had been reported in the United States of a rare and severe type of blood clot called cerebral venous sinus thrombosis, in combination with low levels of blood platelets (thrombocytopenia). All six cases occurred among women between the ages of 18 and 48, and symptoms occurred 6 to 13 days after vaccination. The FDA advised that people who have received the J&J vaccine who develop severe headache, abdominal pain, leg pain, or shortness of breath within three weeks after vaccination should contact their health care provider. The FDA also advised that heparin should not be used to treat these patients.

While this is certainly not good news, I want to stress that these events are very rare, and that we don't know enough yet to say whether the vaccine actually had anything to do with the clotting. If you or your loved ones have received this vaccine, there is no reason to be alarmed unless you experience the severe symptoms listed above within a couple of weeks after receiving it. The CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices is meeting today to review these

cases, and the FDA is also investigating. We will follow their recommendations, and I will update you when we know more.

There's much better news this week on COVID-19 cases and treatment. As of this morning, we had 257 COVID-19-positive inpatients in our hospitals, 57 of whom were in critical care. Our total patient counts this week have been consistently below 300 for the first time since mid-December. The New York State seven-day average test positivity rates were 3.4 percent for New York City and 3.8 percent for Long Island and the Mid-Hudson region as of yesterday. These numbers, too, are lower than they've been for several weeks.

With the decline in patient counts, we continue to slowly and cautiously decommission surge space and restart ambulatory services that were paused during this surge. We are not fully back to normal yet, and we don't expect to be until the patient count falls even lower. But we are moving in the right direction. If you haven't yet returned to your normal clinical assignment, please bear with us just a little longer. We are on track to get you back there.

As Dr. Davis and Dr. Charney announced on Friday, we are now offering a vaccine waiting list for immediate family members of our employees, as long as they are 16 or over and live in New York State. I'm very pleased to tell you that we have already been able to start taking names from that list and offering them appointments. If you'd like to add someone in your immediate family to the waiting list, you can do so [here](#), and someone will contact you once we have confirmed that vaccines are available for them.

We don't use Johnson & Johnson vaccine for this program, so that situation should not affect our scheduling, but as always, we recommend that you also keep trying the [New York State](#), [New York City](#), and other vaccine websites, as they may have availability before we do. And if you have not been vaccinated yourself but would like to be, and you either work onsite, or live in New York State and are 16 or over, please sign up for the [employee waiting list](#).

Finally, a word about food. As much as we love sharing a meal or a treat together at work, I have to remind you that that's still against our rules here on our

campuses. Even with most of you vaccinated by now, we want to avoid the risk that occurs when people gather to eat together without masks on. This rule forbids both catered food at meetings and food that you bring in and serve yourselves for group events, and it applies even if everybody in the group has been vaccinated. We are also going to stop offering snacks at our vaccination pods, for the same reason.

Soon—hopefully very soon—we'll all share some bagels or donuts or a nice plate of sandwiches together. This pandemic will end. All pandemics do, eventually, and the latest numbers are more evidence that we are much closer to the end of this one than to the beginning. All we need is a little more time, a little more patience, and a little more attention to precautions, and we'll be there. I promise. Thank you for all you are doing to help us get there.

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