

## COVID-19 Health System Updates

April 21, 2021, Wednesday

If the COVID-19 surge we just went through felt different to you than the one last spring, you're not alone. Today I want to give you two numbers that show just how different it was.

The first is the number of weeks it took to come down from the peak number of inpatients with COVID-19 infection to half of the peak. In the first surge, a year ago, it took us three weeks and two days to come down by half. For this surge, we hit that milestone just a couple of days ago—12 weeks after the peak.

This was really a different surge. It took much longer to go up, and much longer to come back down. It tested our patience, and our resolve, in different ways. I can't begin to thank you enough for hanging in there. None of us expected it to last this long. But now, 12 weeks later, here we are. Significantly past the peak; not yet all the way back to normal, but closer than we've been for a long time.

The second number is a very good one, and speaks volumes about the care you're providing to our patients and our community.

In April 2020, the mortality rate among our COVID-19 inpatients—the ratio of deaths to discharges—peaked at just below 30 percent. At the peak of this surge, in January and February, the mortality rate was between 17 percent and 19 percent. It's still significantly higher than we're used to; for our non-COVID-19 inpatients, mortality is typically in the low single digits. But it's much better than it was last year.

Mortality figures across the state and region have shown a similar trend, and there are likely many reasons for it. Some of those reasons are already known. This surge occurred as vaccinations were beginning to protect the most vulnerable among us—those who are most likely to have serious illness and be at risk for death. And we've learned more about which specific therapies are most effective.

Another reason is you, the extraordinary caregivers of the Mount Sinai Health System, who worked tirelessly through your own pain and frustration to care for our patients. You created many of the innovations in care that have helped ease the death toll this time. You upheld the finest traditions of our Health System and healed our community, yet again.

You should all take great pride in this achievement.

As of this morning, we had 234 COVID-19-positive inpatients across the system, 50 of whom were in critical care. The New York State seven-day average test positivity rates as of yesterday were 3.0 percent for New York City and Long Island, and 3.2 percent for the mid-Hudson region.

### **More About Meetings and Food**

Last week I reminded you about our policy on meetings and food. There have been some questions since then, and with graduations and other spring events coming up, I want to go into a bit more detail today. I know many of you are starting to feel more comfortable with socializing in your personal lives, and that may include socializing with work colleagues, but I ask that we maintain masking and social distancing at all official Mount Sinai meetings and events.

This means that for the foreseeable future, food and drinks cannot be served at any group event organized or paid for by Mount Sinai, on or off campus, whether or not everyone at the event has been vaccinated. When food or drinks are being served, masks come off, and it's likely that you'll be less than six feet away from other people for long periods of time, which is still considered unsafe. This may sound harsh, but we need to keep everyone safe until COVID-19 subsides further in our community. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) still [advises against](#) medium or large gatherings, even if everyone is vaccinated, and it's especially important for us as health care workers to set good examples for the public.

These rules won't last forever, and I will let you know as soon as they can be relaxed. But in the meantime, please celebrate all Mount Sinai-related events virtually, and if you need to have an in-person meeting or event, within the policy, don't serve food, and remember to keep your masks on.

## **New Study Shows Need for Vaccinating Young Adults**

A study led by Stuart Sealfon, MD, that tracked more than 3,000 young Marines suggests that COVID-19 vaccination is crucial even in young adults who have already had the virus. "Young people can catch the virus again and may still transmit it to others," says Dr. Sealfon, the Sara B. and Seth M. Glickenhau Professor of Neurology. "This is an important point to know and remember as vaccine rollouts continue."

The study, just published in [The Lancet Respiratory Medicine](#), was conducted by researchers from Mount Sinai and the Naval Medical Research Center. The study population consisted of 3,249 Marine recruits between 18 and 20 years old who were tested at study entry for SARS-CoV-2 antibodies, and then tested repeatedly for COVID-19 using polymerase chain reaction (PCR) during a two-week quarantine period before basic training and during the training itself. Researchers found that 10 percent of participants who had SARS-CoV-2 antibodies, showing a previous infection, and who were PCR-negative on at least three tests over a four-week period, later tested PCR-positive—indicating a new SARS-CoV-2 infection.

The takeaway thought: "Young people should get the vaccine whenever possible," Dr. Sealfon says, "since vaccination is necessary to boost immune responses, prevent reinfection, and reduce transmission." Read more [here](#).

On that note, I would like to remind you that everyone who is 16 or over is now eligible for vaccination. Here at Mount Sinai, **we are now welcoming you and your family members, friends, and other loved ones** who live in New York State to sign up for our waiting lists if you or they haven't been vaccinated yet. So far, we have been able to offer appointments to everyone who has signed up on these lists, but depending on where you live, you can also check the [New York State](#), [New York City](#), [New Jersey](#), [Connecticut](#), or [Pennsylvania](#) vaccine sites for

appointments. The CDC's [VaccineFinder](#) site also has information about available appointments across the country.

I'll close this week with one more remarkable number. Our tireless vaccination teams have now given more than 200,000 doses to employees, patients, and other members of our Mount Sinai family. Please join them if you haven't yet—there is nothing more important that you can do to help bring this pandemic to an end.

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