

### **COVID-19 Health System Updates, February 3**

It has already been a long and frustrating winter, and that snowstorm we just had didn't help. But we are now at the midpoint, with Groundhog Day yesterday and the Super Bowl coming up on Sunday. I'm sure that many of you want to get together with family and friends for the big game.

I don't want to be a killjoy or sound like a broken record, and I'm not saying this because I'm a Green Bay Packer fan (although I am), but the Super Bowl is another one of those events that you're better off playing down this year.

Gathering indoors and unmasked to cheer together for three hours is one of the riskiest things you can do, even if some of you have already been vaccinated. By all means, grab a beer and make yourself some nachos or wings, but please enjoy the game only with your own household. We are so close to putting an end to this horrible pandemic. Let's not blow it now.

The numbers for the week continue to hint that things will soon get better. The New York State seven-day average test positivity rates stood yesterday at 5.1 percent for New York City, 6.0 percent for Long Island, and 5.8 percent for the Mid-Hudson region. These are continuing to show steady declines. In our hospitals, as of this morning, we had 502 COVID-19-positive inpatients, including 88 in critical care. These numbers have been moving up and down in a fairly small range for several weeks now without breaking out in either direction. But we still believe that the decline in positive tests will feed through, sooner or later, into lower hospitalization rates.

On the vaccination front, we have received a new shipment of vaccines. We kept offering second doses and employee vaccinations right through the storm, and I'm pleased to report that we had very few no-shows, despite the weather and transportation shutdowns. It shows you how eager people are to be vaccinated, as more than 30,000 members of our Mount Sinai family already have been. Our vaccine supply is not yet strong enough for us to start taking

new patient appointments, but as always, we have enough for every eligible employee who wants it, and if you're ready to be vaccinated you can [sign up](#) at any time.

### **Should I Wear Two Masks?**

You've probably read in the news about several new, more transmissible SARS-CoV-2 variants and how to protect yourselves. One widely discussed recommendation, from Anthony Fauci, MD, among others, is to wear two masks at a time. Here is what you need to know about that:

- **At work, two masks are not necessary.** Disposable three-ply surgical (medical) masks issued by the Mount Sinai Health System are made of a synthetic material called polypropylene that is more effective at protecting you, since they can filter particles in the air.
- **N-95 respirators should be covered with surgical masks to prevent soiling of the N-95s**, as we have long recommended. This is not about increasing protection for you or our patients, but rather about helping to keep that N-95 in good shape for as long as you are using it. And, of course and always, you should use a new N-95 if the one you are using becomes soiled. If you are wearing a full face shield for eye protection, the N-95 does not need to be covered by a surgical mask because it is already protected by the face shield.
- **Outside of work, wearing two cloth masks may give you additional protection, similar to a medical mask.** While most cloth masks are effective at preventing the spread of respiratory droplets when the wearer is infected, they are not as efficient at filtering particles as you breathe in. For that reason, experts like Dr. Fauci encourage everyone to wear two cloth masks when out in public.

This is a good time for me to add a general reminder about the Mount Sinai COVID-19 Safety [Code of Conduct](#). In addition to consistent and appropriate use of masks, we should all remember to maintain social distancing in elevators and common areas, and especially when eating and you cannot

wear a mask; practice frequent hand hygiene; and wear eye protection when you are providing direct patient care at the bedside or in a treatment room.

Outside of work, as I said earlier, please be judicious about Super Bowl parties and other indoor gatherings. We all want to have fun and see our friends and loved ones and get back to our normal lives. Believe me, I know how you feel. But we won't be able to live our normal lives for as long as this pandemic is out of control, with waves of new infections following one after another, as we just saw coming out of the holidays.

We're getting closer to the end. We really are. The vaccines are here, and within a few months they will have reached enough people to start making a difference. Warmer weather is coming too, and with it, the opportunity to see people safely outdoors even if you or they haven't been vaccinated yet. Let's not falter now. Let's make it to the finish line together, safely. I want you to be there with me when we do.

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