

COVID-19 Health System Updates

May 5, 2021, Wednesday

Today, Wednesday, May 5, is World Hand Hygiene Day. This is an especially important event to observe during the COVID-19 pandemic; now more than ever, we want everyone washing their hands regularly.

Proper hand hygiene protects our patients, our families, our colleagues, and ourselves. Hand hygiene is the most important measure we can take to avoid transmission of harmful germs and prevent health care-associated infections. Clean hands really can save lives.

The surge continues to wind down this week. As of this morning, we had 140 COVID-19-positive inpatients across the system, 34 of whom were in critical care. The New York State seven-day average test positivity rates as of yesterday were 1.7 percent for New York City and Long Island, and 1.8 percent for the Mid-Hudson region. All of these numbers are still moving in the right direction, and as they do, we are continuing to cautiously restore operations at our hospitals that were suspended or scaled back during the surge.

You may have seen in the news media that the Food and Drug Administration is likely to rule soon on Pfizer's application for emergency use authorization for its COVID-19 vaccine in children ages 12 to 15. We are making plans to welcome this age group to our vaccine pods once the federal and state governments have given the OK, and I will let you know how that will work as soon as I can. In the meantime, anybody 16 or over who lives, works, or studies in New York is welcome to sign up for a vaccine appointment [at this link](#) or by calling (646) 605-5764.

Boosting the Power of Remdesivir

Remdesivir, a drug approved for treating COVID-19 patients, is up to 10 times more effective when it is combined with repurposed drugs for hepatitis C virus

(HCV). This intriguing finding was published recently in [Cell Reports](#) by a team led by Kris White, PhD, Assistant Professor of Microbiology, and Adolfo García-Sastre, PhD, Irene and Dr. Arthur M. Fishberg Professor of Medicine, and Director of the Global Health and Emerging Pathogens Institute.

The drug combination could be “a game changer,” Dr. García-Sastre says, because it points a way toward a treatment for unvaccinated people who become infected, as well as for vaccinated people whose immunity has waned, for example due to the emergence of COVID-19 variants.

The research team, also led by scientists from the University of Texas at Austin and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, found that four HCV drugs inhibited the SARS-CoV-2 virus through a protease known as PLpro—meaning they reduced the amount of the virus that causes COVID-19 in cells grown in culture. In further *in vitro* testing, in combination with remdesivir, the four drugs significantly raised its efficacy.

“We hope this work will encourage the development of specific SARS-CoV-2 PLpro inhibitors for inclusion in combination therapies to produce a highly effective antiviral cocktail that may potentially prevent the rise of resistance mutations,” Dr. White says. Read more [here](#).

Aspen Ideas Festival

The Aspen Ideas: Health event was produced virtually again this year due to COVID-19. The event explored big ideas and bold approaches to shaping the future of health. Programming featured Mount Sinai thought leaders, including a conversation between Kenneth L. Davis, MD, President and Chief Executive Officer, and Brendan Carr, MD, System Chair of Emergency Medicine, on [Preventing the Next Pandemic](#), and Dr. García-Sastre with Özlem Türeci, Chief Medical Officer of BioNTech, on [vaccine technology](#). They're worth watching.

I hope you get a chance to enjoy the beautiful spring weather (when it comes back), and to spend time—virtually or in person—with your loved ones for Mother's Day on Sunday. Please remember to wash your hands, to wear a mask

when necessary, and to get yourself and your loved ones vaccinated if they haven't been yet. The end of the pandemic comes closer every day that we do these things. Thank you again for everything you are doing.

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