COVID-19 Health System Updates

August 11, 2021, Wednesday

We've been seeing continued steady increases in our COVID-19 caseloads over the past week. Most of these patients are unvaccinated, and those who are vaccinated typically are either immunocompromised or quite elderly, or have some other comorbidity. Everything we've seen to this point confirms the finding that the vaccines are highly effective at preventing hospitalization and death from COVID-19.
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As the numbers go up, we are beginning to reinstitute COVID-19 units at many of our sites, cohorting patients together so that we can more easily take care of them. To date, we've been able to care for these patients without significantly disrupting our other services, but if that changes I will let you know.

As of this morning, we had 101 COVID-19-positive inpatients across the system, 18 of whom were in critical care. The New York State seven-day average test positivity rates stood yesterday at 2.6 percent for New York City, 3.6 percent for Long Island, and 3.1 percent for the mid-Hudson region.

We hope that the relatively high levels of vaccination in our region will nip this surge in the bud, before it gets as bad as we're seeing in other parts of the country. But right now, our test positivity rates mean the metropolitan region is an area with "high risk" for transmission, which means we need to take extra precautions.

New Requirements for PPE Use

You know about the renewed universal masking rule, which we announced last week, and which requires everyone—vaccinated or not—to wear a mask everywhere on

Mount Sinai property, unless you're alone in a private office, or eating or drinking at least six feet from the nearest person in designated spaces.

In addition, as of today, eye protection is again mandatory for all clinical care, and an N95 mask is required for all aerosol-generating procedures, even if the patient tests negative. We're putting these rules back in place to help keep all of you safe.

Mandatory Testing for Unvaccinated Employees

Another way we're working to keep all of you safe is the mandatory testing program for unvaccinated employees, which begins next month. All employees whose proof of vaccination has not been verified by Employee Health Services (EHS) by Friday, August 13, will be required to have a weekly PCR test at an assigned employee testing site starting in early September. (If you have a "Vaccinated" sticker on your ID badge, or if you've been approved to get one, that means we've verified that you have been vaccinated and you are exempt from this testing program.)

Next week, employees required to undergo testing will receive an email or letter with directions for how to enroll in the mandatory testing program. Those who have been vaccinated but have not yet submitted proof to EHS should do so immediately. It takes three to five business days for EHS to review and verify vaccine status, and you will be required to test weekly until you receive a verification email from EHS. Employees who have a current Remote Work Agreement in place will be exempt from weekly testing.

Addressing Common Vaccine Questions

A large majority of you are already vaccinated, but I know that some still have concerns that have kept you from getting the shot. We recently published some one-page flyers addressing some of the most common questions we hear:

- Will the COVID-19 Vaccines Affect My Fertility?
- Were the COVID-19 Vaccines Made Too Quickly?
- Do the COVID-19 Vaccines Protect Me from the Delta Variant?
- Should I Get Vaccinated if I Have Allergies?
- I've Had COVID-19. Do I Need to Get Vaccinated?

Please feel free to look at them, print them out, and share them with colleagues or patients who have questions.

I also want to point out a new study reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention addressing that last question. The study looked at people in Kentucky who had COVID-19 in 2020 and then got it a second time in May or June of this year. The researchers found that people who were not vaccinated were more than twice as likely to get reinfected as those who were vaccinated. So yes: even if you've had COVID-19 already, get vaccinated. It will help protect you from getting it a second time.

Thank you, yet again, for everything you do. The next weeks may bring us more COVID-19 patients than we've seen in the past few months, but I am confident that, working together, we'll be able to meet this challenge just as we have before. It continues to be the honor of my life to wear the Mount Sinai badge alongside all of you. You are truly the best health care team around.

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