COVID-19 Health System Updates

August 25, 2021, Wednesday

Among the many disturbing things about COVID-19 is what it is doing to people who are pregnant. We are seeing more and more reports in the news like that from one hospital in Alabama that is seeing "extraordinary" numbers of mostly unvaccinated pregnant COVID-19 patients in their ICUs and on ventilators. While our region's higher vaccination rates mean we're not as overwhelmed as they are, we have been seeing some of these cases in our own hospitals too.

Serious illness and death are particularly heartbreaking when they involve pregnancy—and especially when they are preventable, as these outcomes are with a COVID-19 vaccine. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said unambiguously a short while ago that pregnant people should receive the COVID-19 vaccines. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the Society for Maternal Fetal Medicine have been just as clear about the importance of vaccination in pregnant patients. Here is a short video in which our expert explains why.

You've heard a lot from Dr. Davis and Dr. Charney about our vaccine mandate recently, but I want to emphasize **why** we are doing it. The COVID-19 vaccines save lives. That is completely beyond dispute by now. The Food and Drug Administration's full approval of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine on Monday is only the latest evidence for that.

And there's new evidence this week that the vaccines are powerfully effective at keeping people out of the hospital. Yesterday, the CDC released a study from Los Angeles County that showed unvaccinated people were 29 times more likely to be hospitalized with COVID-19 than vaccinated people were.

As of this morning, we had 119 COVID-19-positive inpatients across the system, 29 of whom were in critical care. The New York State seven-day average test positivity rates as of yesterday were 2.5 percent for New York City, 4.0 percent for Long Island, and 3.4 percent for the mid-Hudson region.

We all took on a sacred obligation when we went into health care: to put the needs of the patients first, and to do everything we can to save human life. Taking the COVID-19 vaccine if you haven't yet is the single best thing you can do right now to fulfill that obligation. That is why we're mandating it for all Mount Sinai employees, whether you are working at any of our facilities or remotely. That's why New York State is mandating it for all health care workers.

So here's one more reminder: you need to get your first vaccine shot by Monday, September 13, and register it with Employee Health Services (EHS) if you haven't yet. If you do not, you will be placed into immediate job jeopardy and will be terminated shortly thereafter, and if you lose your job because you failed to get vaccinated, New York State has said you will not be eligible for unemployment.

Also, as we've mentioned before, there will be some limited exemptions for people who cannot be vaccinated for medical or religious reasons. The deadline to apply for an exemption is this Monday, August 30. Those who receive exemptions will have to undergo weekly PCR testing to help keep our patients and our Mount Sinai family safe. Those who do not receive exemptions must get their first shot by Monday, September 13, to remain employed here.

I know many of you will have questions about exactly how the mandate will work. We have put together a Toolkit and an FAQ and will be adding to it as policies get written and decisions get made. Please feel free to stop back often for updates. (Also, please post the attached flyer in your work area to make sure your teams know about the FDA approval of the Pfizer vaccine.)

Without a doubt, this is one of the most complex periods in a complex pandemic. We are trying to heal our COVID-19 patients, vaccinate our community, and take care of everyone else who needs our care—all at the same time. But I am confident that with your help, we will pull through, as we have done so many times before. Thank you once again for everything you do.

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