COVID-19 Health System Updates

February 10, 2021

The biggest news this week is the latest update to New York State's vaccine distribution guidelines. As of Monday, February 15, people under 65 years of age with certain comorbidities that put them at risk for severe COVID-19 will also be eligible to be vaccinated. The full list is available on the state website and includes types of pulmonary and heart disease, cancer, diabetes, immunocompromised states, and obesity, among others.

For us here at Mount Sinai, this means a few things. We don't know yet if we will be getting any vaccine to offer to our patients with these conditions, but we do know that many of our patients will be coming to us for certification that they are eligible. We are developing a standard form letter in Epic that providers can give to patients. It is important to provide these letters only to patients who are eligible under the state guidelines.

To free up vaccine for these patients, as you know, the state announced that after Monday, they will be reallocating vaccine supplies previously dedicated for health care workers' first doses. Now, this isn't an absolute deadline for those of you who were not yet vaccinated. We expect that vaccine will still be available for any eligible health care worker who wants it, even after Monday. But it may be more difficult to obtain and schedule, so if you've been on the fence about getting the vaccine, you're best off getting it now.

Eligible employees can schedule an appointment here; you can use that link as well if you have a first dose appointment later than this week and want to move it up. Just be sure to cancel your original appointment. And if you manage or work with employees who don't regularly read their email, there's a poster here that you can print out, share at huddles, and post in break rooms and on bulletin boards.

Some notes on eligibility:

- As a reminder, all faculty, staff, trainees, and students who work or study onsite at any of our facilities, as well as all our voluntary physicians and patient-facing staff members at voluntary practices, are eligible.

- Employees working remotely who are 65 or over are also eligible, and we will let you know as soon as we have guidance on vaccinating employees under 65 with comorbidities starting next week.

- If you are under 65, working remotely, and do not have any comorbidities, unfortunately, we do not yet have guidance on when you can be vaccinated.

As another reminder, the new eligibility rules and supply changes are for first vaccine doses only. Second doses come from a separate vaccine supply, and all patients and employees who got their first dose from us should plan on getting their second dose at the same location.

And one last reminder—if you haven't taken our one-question survey about the vaccines, there is still time to do so. If you don't regularly work on campus and fill out the daily attestation, you can find the survey [here](). If you've answered the question on the attestation, you do not need to take this survey separately. And again, participation is completely optional.

I know these frequent changes can be confusing, and I really appreciate everyone's patience as we sort out this latest round. Ultimately, this is good news—the more people who become eligible for vaccine, the closer we get to bringing this pandemic under control.

Our weekly update on the numbers shows them to be basically where they were last week. The seven-day average New York State test positivity rates as of yesterday were 5.1 percent for New York City, 5.4 percent for Long Island, and 5.3 percent for the Mid-Hudson region. As of this morning, we had 516 COVID-19-positive inpatients across the system, 90 of whom were in critical care. We would like to see these numbers fall, but at least they are not rising. The operational

changes we put in place several weeks ago are still giving us the headroom we need to accommodate these patients.

Celebrating Ash Wednesday, Safely

We have now lived through almost a full year of holiday observances, keeping each other safe by changing how we gather and how we engage in religious practices. Ash Wednesday is coming up next Wednesday, February 17. This year, our chaplains will provide ashes to staff and patients across our hospitals in a COVID-19-safe way. I am especially grateful to our spiritual care teams, who will be working this Ash Wednesday without the assistance of the volunteers who usually lend an extra hand. For those of you who will be observing this holiday, I wish you a meaningful beginning to the season of Lent.

This is also a good time to reiterate an important general point related to COVID-19 and vaccination. Besides Ash Wednesday, there are other events this month—Valentine's Day, Mardi Gras, Presidents' Day, Purim—when we might want to gather with family and friends. Even if you have received both vaccine shots, it's best to keep masking and social distancing at events like this if you gather with people from outside your household. While the vaccine should prevent you from getting seriously ill from COVID-19, we need more data before we can say for sure that it prevents you from transmitting the virus asymptomatically to others. We will hopefully know more about this in the next few months.

A Weekly Moment of Appreciation

People who run marathons often say the miles seem to get longer just before the end. We are now in the longest miles of the COVID-19 marathon. Though the finish line is in sight and we feel much more hope than ever before, I am aware of how exhausted you are—personally, professionally, and emotionally.

Beginning tomorrow, we will be offering a weekly opportunity for you to connect with your colleagues, appreciate your hard work, and pause to take time for yourself. Keep an eye out for local broadcast emails at your hospitals. We hope

these moments we create together will help you to continue to do your extraordinary work so we can all make it to the end of this marathon.

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