

COVID-19 Health System Updates

February 17, 2021, Wednesday

I want to start by wishing everyone a happy Lunar New Year, and a good Year of the Ox to those who observe it. Today is, of course, Ash Wednesday, and as I mentioned last week, we have set up COVID-19-compliant procedures for our colleagues who observe today's rites.

Whatever your faith or background, I hope you were able to have a refreshing break this weekend. There have been so many false starts and changes that I want to be a bit cautious here, but this week we are seeing increasing evidence that we are past the worst of this latest COVID-19 surge.

As of yesterday, the New York State seven-day test positivity rates were 4.4 percent for New York City, 4.6 percent for Long Island, and 4.5 percent for the Mid-Hudson region. These numbers have now been declining for a solid month. As of this morning, we had 494 COVID-19-positive inpatients in our hospitals, 96 of whom were in critical care. This is the third straight day we have been below 500 total cases. While we have not yet decisively broken out of the range in which these numbers have fluctuated in this year, that is an encouraging sign.

If we see a bit more progress in our caseloads, it is likely that we will move to restart some procedures at some of the sites that we put on hold several weeks ago because of the surge. We have set up triggers for this decision based on what we hope will be continuing declines in the number of COVID-19 patients we are treating. We are cautiously hopeful that this could begin as early as next week.

The news is not as encouraging with respect to offering vaccinations, unfortunately. As I announced on Sunday, we have received no new supplies of first-dose vaccine this week and, as a result, have had to cancel all patient first-dose appointments, except at Mount Sinai South Nassau. We continue to have enough vaccine on hand for scheduled employee first doses through Tuesday,

February 23, but we cannot schedule new employee appointments or accept walk-ins.

All patient and employee second doses are proceeding as scheduled.

We are keeping a [waiting list](#) for Mount Sinai **onsite** employees, trainees, students, and voluntary physicians who would like to schedule their first vaccinations, but as I said on Sunday, we are sadly not able to use that list for employees who **work remotely** and are 65 or over, or have one of the [medical conditions listed by the state](#) last week that make them eligible for vaccine.

I strongly recommend that all employees who are eligible for vaccine, and who do not have a first-dose appointment scheduled with us on or before February 23, try to get an appointment via the [New York State](#) or [New York City](#) websites. This may well be quicker than waiting for vaccine to be available through Mount Sinai.

Again, this is because an ongoing expansion of city and state vaccination sites has put pressure on continued supplies to hospitals. We do not know how long this will last or whether we will eventually get new vaccine supplies. This is the best information we have right now. We are very sorry that we cannot offer vaccines to our patients at present.

One final note on vaccines, and this applies to everyone who has already had their shots as well as those who are still waiting: The COVID-19 vaccines are free for everyone, whether or not you have insurance. If you do have insurance; your insurance may be billed, but you will not be charged a co-pay or other fee.

If you get a bill in error, you do not need to pay it. Per federal law, there is no out-of-pocket cost to the patient. Contact the phone number on the bill to resolve the issue. If you are an employee and you get a bill for the vaccine in error, please email Covidvaccinebilling@mountsinai.org.

New Policy on Work and Pay in an Emergency

The Health System has updated its policy on work and pay in an emergency. The [new policy](#) applies system-wide and replaces policies that were in place at individual sites. It covers topics that include emergency procedures and crisis pay. Please review it when you have a chance.

Speaking Our Patients' Languages

It is so important to make information available to our patients in their preferred language, and we recently added a toolbar to the mountsinai.org website that enables site visitors to convert the webpage to one of 100 languages, including Spanish, Russian, and Chinese. With content related to COVID-19 evolving quickly, this tool will ensure all patients have access to the latest information since the translation takes place instantaneously.

From the homepage or any page within the Patient Care and [COVID-19 sections](#), users are able to choose a language by clicking on the “Select Language” menu featured at the top of the site. Once the user chooses a language, the site will continue to be translated throughout their visit to mountsinai.org.

Meet Our Scientists

The search for better treatments for COVID-19 has led a team of our scientists, with colleagues in San Francisco, to plitidepsin (pli-tee-DEP-sin)—an antiviral drug derived from a sea organism. Their study, which was just published in [Science](#), found that when tested in human lung cells, plitidepsin was 28-fold more effective than remdesivir, the only antiviral drug currently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to treat COVID-19. “Plitidepsin is quite unique in its potency,” says one of the study’s corresponding authors, Kris M. White, PhD, Assistant Professor of Microbiology, and a member of the Global Health and Emerging Pathogens Institute at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. “It is likely going to be able to work against any variant of SARS-CoV-2 and other coronaviruses.”

Plitidepsin is approved in Australia under the name Aplidin as a treatment for multiple myeloma. The maker of the drug, PharmaMar, in October released results

of a phase 1,2 clinical trial of Aplidin, finding that it was safe and effective in helping hospitalized patients recover from COVID-19. The company is now establishing phase 3 trials.

“The ongoing pandemic created the immediate need for us to find antiviral therapeutics that could be moved into the clinic. This led us to screen clinically approved drugs with established data and safety profiles, says corresponding study author Adolfo García-Sastre, PhD, Irene and Dr. Arthur M. Fishberg Professor of Medicine and Director of the Global Health Emerging Pathogens Institute. “We found that plitidepsin was a very promising therapeutic candidate.” Read more [here](#).

A Campaign Launches: This Jab’s for You

Mount Sinai Health System is joining medical centers across the United States in a grassroots effort to encourage public participation in vaccinations against COVID-19. The vaccination challenge known as “[This Jab’s for You](#)” will also honor the lives lost during the global pandemic and the countless health care workers, families, and loved ones who have been impacted by the spread of the disease. It is led in part by Steven Arsht, MD, Assistant Professor of Orthopedics. Dr. Arsht was inspired to help start the vaccination challenge as a tribute to his brother-in-law Louis Sarrel, who lost his battle with COVID-19 in April just three days after his 58th birthday and shortly after going into remission from treatment for lymphoma.

If you are getting vaccinated and want to share your experience on social media, you can participate in this campaign by using the hashtag #ThisJabsForYou and tag @thisjabsforyou. A [template](#) is available online to download and fill out listing the name of the person the vaccination is in remembrance, and more information can be found [here](#).

I want to close by thanking you for your attention today, and for your hard work over these last several weeks. We are not at the end of this surge but we can, we hope, see the end from here. A separate announcement will go out soon with additional details about the gratitude program we are in the process of launching. I

would add to that message that I am truly grateful for the honor of being your colleague and wearing the Mount Sinai badge alongside you through these challenging times.

Vicki R. LoPachin, MD, MBA

Senior Vice President

Chief Medical Officer Mount Sinai Health System