

COVID-19 Health System Updates

December 2, 2020, Wednesday

I hope you all had a good Thanksgiving and were able to rest and refresh yourselves a bit. As we've expected, December is bringing more increases in COVID-19 patient numbers and in the work we must do to care for those patients. We should all expect the numbers to rise further as people who contracted COVID-19 over the holiday start to become symptomatic and need treatment.

This week, Governor Cuomo announced several measures intended to help New York State manage the COVID-19 crisis through the winter. They include things that we here at the Mount Sinai Health System have already been doing. For example, health systems will need to have plans to move patients around to make sure that no one hospital becomes overwhelmed. We've been doing that for weeks, and it is working very well, thanks to everyone's cooperation and coordination. Health systems will also need plans to increase bed capacity and to identify additional staff, including retired doctors and nurses, who could help care for the patients in those beds. We've been working on that as well.

Further down the line, we can expect the state to ask for plans to balance the patient load, not just within health systems but between them. There will also be plans for emergency field hospitals in hard-hit areas. We hope that in New York City, we never need to resort to these emergency measures. We all remember the Central Park tent and Javits Center hospitals from the spring, and our modeling team still projects that this surge will crest far short of where we were then. But we know how to do it if we need to, and we stand ready to work with our colleagues at the region's other health systems. With a true team effort, we will handle this latest surge, just as we have in the past.

As of this morning, we had 178 COVID-19-positive inpatients across the system, 36 of whom were in critical care. The New York State seven-day

average test positivity rates as of yesterday were 3.1 percent for New York City, 3.9 percent for Long Island, and 4.7 percent for the Mid-Hudson region.

Vaccine Update

The FDA is scheduled to discuss the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine on Thursday, December 10, and the Moderna vaccine on Thursday, December 17. It is possible that emergency use authorizations (EUAs) could be granted shortly after that, and if that happens, we might be able to offer the vaccine to the first groups of eligible health care workers as soon as the second half of this month. Vaccine supplies will be limited initially, and only certain categories of staff will likely be eligible at first. That will expand as more doses become available.

We are scheduling virtual town halls at many of our sites soon to provide the latest information about the vaccines. If one is scheduled where you work, we hope you will tune in.

Emergency Use Authorization for Antibody Therapy

As Drs. Aberg, Patel, and Mashni announced Monday, two antibody therapies for non-hospitalized patients age 12 and older with mild to moderate symptoms of COVID-19, bamlanivimab and casirivimab/imdevimab, have received EUA in the last few weeks. We have a very limited allocation of these agents through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and New York State, and there is a process for screening patients who may potentially derive benefit from either of them. Please refer to the [broadcast email](#) about these agents for more details (you must be inside the firewall to view this link).

Two New Asymptomatic Testing Sites Open

We have now opened two new testing sites for faculty, staff, trainees, and students who do not have symptoms of COVID-19. They are at 1190 Fifth Avenue and 2 West 86th Street. For more information about asymptomatic employee testing, please click [here](#). We look forward to opening more sites.

Meet Our COVID-19 Scientists

If you have already contracted COVID-19, are you protected from getting it again? A study led by Ania Wajnberg, MD, Associate Professor of Medicine; Carlos Cordon-Cardo, MD, PhD, the Irene Heinz Given and John LaPorte Given Professor and Chair of Pathology, Molecular, and Cell-Based Medicine; and Florian Krammer, PhD, Mount Sinai Professor in Vaccinology, has provided some important insights. Their team found that more than 90 percent of people who recovered from mild and moderate cases of COVID-19 produced a robust and possibly protective level of antibodies that remained stable for at least five months. The study, published in [Science](#), included 30,082 people found to have antibodies to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, and was one of the largest of its kind ever conducted. “Everyone should continue to follow guidelines around social distancing, masks, and hand-washing,” Dr. Wajnberg says, “But this is encouraging data.” Read more about it [here](#).

The study also demonstrated the strength and reliability of Mount Sinai’s ELISA antibody test, which was the first to detect and measure the amount of antibodies to SARS-CoV-2 in the blood. Kantaro Biosciences, a joint venture of the Mount Sinai Health System and RenalytixAI, last week received [emergency use authorization](#) for test kits based on this technology. And it is now manufacturing them in partnership with Bio-Techne Corporation—with the capacity to produce millions each month. It’s the very definition of translational research: invent something in the lab and apply it to the critical needs of patients.

Reminder: Break Room Safety Video Contest

Our contest for the best video about break room safety is still open. From now until Friday, December 4, make a 15- to 30-second video of yourself and your colleagues, showing how to be safe while in the break room. Details are in the attached poster. Winners will receive a free Apple Watch. And remember that dancing is encouraged, but not required.

This contest is intended to be fun, but the underlying issue is serious. I need every single one of you to help. We can absolutely cope with this current surge in cases, but only if we recommit ourselves to the [COVID-19 Code of Conduct](#). Please be scrupulous at all times about masking and hand hygiene. Keep your distance from coworkers, friends, and others you don't live with, whether you're in a break room or not at work. Promise me that you'll be here and healthy—for yourself, for your own family, for your Mount Sinai family, and for the patients who need you now more than ever.

Together, we will overcome this challenge again. I truly believe that. Because I truly believe in all of you.

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