

COVID-19 Health System Updates, February 24, 2021

I have good news to report this week. We have received new supplies of COVID-19 vaccine, which will allow us to resume vaccinating patients and eligible staff.

Based on current guidance, we are going to concentrate on vaccinating our eligible employees, people who are 65 and older, and the most vulnerable eligible patients, including those with complex diseases, members of minority groups, and residents of Brooklyn and Queens. We are reaching out to these patients directly—and through community groups—to offer appointments by phone and text message. We know that not everybody has internet access or is comfortable using it. We are determined to make it easy for patients and community residents to make appointments.

This new shipment means that we will be able to resume vaccinating our eligible onsite faculty, staff, students, and trainees, as well as voluntary physicians and their staff. We emailed everyone on our waiting list yesterday to offer them appointments. If you are an eligible employee and have not yet put your name on the waiting list, you can do so [here](#).

If you are working remotely and are 65 and over or have a [qualifying medical condition](#), I am sorry but we cannot yet add you to the waiting list. I will let you know as soon as that changes, but would also encourage you to try to get an appointment via the [New York State](#) or [New York City](#) websites.

And please remember that none of this affects the schedule for second doses. Those come from a separate supply, and everyone who got their first dose from a Mount Sinai location will get their second dose from us, at the same location as the first dose, whenever they are scheduled to.

The news around COVID-19 caseloads and testing continues to be somewhat encouraging this week as well. As of this morning, we had 453 COVID-19-

positive inpatients in our hospitals, 83 of whom were in critical care. The number for total COVID-19 inpatients is the lowest it has been so far this year. It increased slowly over a long period of time and will likely decline the same way, but this is definitely movement in the right direction.

At the same time, I want to acknowledge that the work remains very challenging and frequently exhausting. If you are a nurse or patient care associate in one of our ICUs or on one of our COVID-19 units, it is likely that you aren't seeing and feeling much, or any, relief yet. This is a painful and heart-wrenching reality. Day by day, and week by week, we anticipate that the situation will indeed improve. But we know that, for many, it isn't the case yet.

The New York State seven-day average test positivity rates as of yesterday were 4.5 percent for New York City, 4.3 percent for Long Island, and 4.2 percent for the Mid-Hudson region. This is a slight increase for the city and a small decline for the other two regions.

There is one other number worth noting: the number of Mount Sinai staff on home isolation because of confirmed or suspected COVID-19 is now the lowest since early November. This is definitely something to be grateful for.

Noticed by the NIH

A study by two Mount Sinai scientists—Florian Krammer, PhD, and Viviana Simon, MD, PhD—was [highlighted](#) yesterday on the blog of Francis Collins, MD, PhD, Director of the National Institutes of Health. In the [study](#), published on *medRxiv*, Drs. Krammer and Simon reported that people who previously had COVID-19 showed a robust immune response after just one dose of vaccine. Dr. Collins said that if this finding is borne out by more studies, the Food and Drug Administration might consider whether to require only one vaccine dose for people who previously had COVID-19. This could help extend vaccine supplies and get more people vaccinated sooner.

However, as of right now, and always, it is still vitally important that we continue to follow the CDC recommendations on vaccine dosing, and that has not changed. If it does, we will be ready to adapt to that new guidance.

Reminder About the Travel Policy

It has been awhile since I mentioned the Mount Sinai [travel policy](#), but as we come up on spring break season, it's a good time to remind you. The travel policy is based on New York State law and applies to everyone who travels outside New York and our neighboring states—New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont—for more than 24 hours, **even if you are already fully vaccinated**. If you take such a trip, you need to read the full policy, but in short, you need to be cleared to return to work in one of three ways:

- Take a COVID-19 nasal swab (PCR) test immediately upon your return. If it is negative, you can return to work as soon as you receive the result, but you still must take a second PCR test on day 4 after your return, and that test must also be negative.
- Stay home when you return, and take a PCR test on day 4. If it is negative, you can return to work.
- Stay home for 10 days after you return; if you have had no COVID-19 symptoms, you can then return to work without a test.

If you are approved to work remotely, you can do so during any of these “stay home” periods, but otherwise you will need to take paid leave time, if available, and your manager must approve that paid leave in advance. That may limit your choices, so please discuss this with your manager before scheduling a trip.

All personal travel, as well as the rare cases where essential work travel is approved, must be [registered with Mount Sinai](#) before you leave. PCR test results must be reported. If you live in New York State, you may also have to fill out [this form](#) upon your return.

For more information, [click here](#) and scroll to “Travel Policy.”

Resident Appreciation Day

This Friday, February 26, is Resident Appreciation Day, and I. Michael Leitman, MD, FACS, our Dean for Graduate Medical Education, writes:

“Residency is a key component of graduate medical training, offering an in-depth exposure to medical practice. It can often lead to long working hours matched with many responsibilities. Residents serve as the “house staff” of the hospital and are an integral part to the health care team. They also serve as an indispensable resource for medical students, especially during their clinical clerkships.

Mount Sinai recognizes the importance of our residents and fellows. Resident Appreciation Day is celebrated by medical schools around the nation to show our gratitude and appreciation.”

I would add that our current group of residents are experiencing a year like no other. They have been a backbone of care for our COVID-19 and other patients, and I, for one, have never appreciated them more than I do now. Thank you to all our residents for everything you do.

More Tips of the Cap

We are now entering the third week of our “Connect/Appreciate/Pause” employee recognition campaign, and “CAPs” have been tipped at many sites around the Health System. Here is a brief [video collage](#). I hope you’ve had the chance to participate in an event by now; if not, one will be coming your way soon, so please look out for emails from your local leadership.

Thank you again for everything you do for your colleagues, our patients, and our community. It has taken a long time, but at last we are again seeing consistently good results from all your hard work. Please take a moment when you can to appreciate everything we have accomplished together in recent

weeks. There is much more to do, and more hard work ahead. But we all got into health care to make a difference in the world, and it's nice to know that in that regard—and especially in the lives of the thousands of patients we have cared for, healed from, or vaccinated for, COVID-19—we are succeeding.

Vicki R. LoPachin, MD, MBA

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