

COVID-19 Health System Updates

March 31, 2021, Wednesday

This week began with some good news: a [study](#) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) showed that the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are highly effective in real-world settings.

The CDC found the vaccines to be 90 percent effective at preventing both symptomatic and asymptomatic infections in vaccinated individuals who were at least 14 days after their second dose. The 3,950 study participants were all health care workers, first responders, or other essential front-line workers. Of the 205 cases of laboratory-confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection during the study period, 161 were in participants who had not yet been vaccinated, and only three were in fully vaccinated people. The rest occurred in people who had received at least one shot but were not yet 14 days past the second.

(The study was conducted between December 14, 2020, and March 13, 2021. This period was mostly before the Johnson & Johnson vaccine had been authorized for use, which is probably why it wasn't included.)

The vaccines work. That is now beyond doubt. But there are also some new and concerning numbers regarding infections in those not vaccinated: New Jersey and New York now lead the country in new cases per capita. So it's no time to let down your guard, especially if you or your loved ones haven't been vaccinated yet. Please continue to wear your mask, wash your hands, and keep your distance from other people.

And if you haven't been vaccinated yet, please sign up on our [employee waiting list](#) if you work onsite for Mount Sinai, or you live in New York, work remotely, and are 30 or over or have a [qualifying comorbidity](#). You can also try to make an appointment through the [New York State](#) or [New York City](#) sites or [VaccineFinder](#). Getting vaccinated is free. It's safe. It's by far the best way to protect yourself and help end this pandemic.

Yes, you read that correctly: all adult New York residents 30 and over or who have comorbidities are now eligible. And starting next Tuesday, April 6, all New Yorkers 16 and over, regardless of health conditions, will be eligible for COVID-19 vaccines. It will take some time to get everyone in those groups vaccinated, but this is real progress.

As of this morning, we had 334 COVID-19-positive inpatients across the system, 59 of whom were in critical care. The New York State seven-day average test positivity rates were 4.2 percent for New York City, 4.3 percent for Long Island, and 4.7 percent for the Mid-Hudson region.

With the lower case numbers in mind, we are continuing, slowly and methodically, to restart some ambulatory procedures at some of our sites that had been paused for the COVID-19 surge. We are focused at this time on procedures that are not likely to generate an inpatient stay, because we know that many of our care teams still need a break, and we are determined to get you one.

Excelsior Pass Makes Its Debut

Last weekend, Governor Cuomo announced the launch of “Excelsior Pass,” New York State’s effort to make COVID-19 vaccination and test results easily and securely available for you to use at participating businesses and events. It is in use in a pilot program, mainly at large sports events, and will expand to other businesses and venues in April.

Mount Sinai has been working with Excelsior Pass for some time now, and I’m pleased to let you know how you and your patients can get your Mount Sinai vaccination or test results loaded into the app.

- All vaccinations performed in New York State, including those at all our pods, are recorded in the state’s database. Go to the [Excelsior Pass website](#), click on “Get Started,” and then follow the instructions. You’ll need to know the date of your second vaccination to complete the form. You should receive a QR code that you can scan into the app on your smartphone or print out to take to an event. Vaccination “passes” are good for 30 days and can be renewed.
- Test results obtained through the Mount Sinai Hospital Center for Clinical Laboratories—including the [employee test sites](#) at 1190 Fifth Avenue and 2 West

86th Street as well as inpatient and Emergency Department testing—are uploaded to the Excelsior Pass database every 15 minutes. The process for obtaining a negative test “pass” is the same as for vaccinations: go to the [website](#) and follow the instructions. Test result “passes” are good until midnight on the third day after the test.

- The new Mount Sinai COVID-19 Saliva Testing Program facilitates access to commercial, travel, and social activities by reporting results to Excelsior Pass. Appointments at any of the program’s four sites can be booked through its [web page](#). There is a fee for this service, and patients sign a waiver to acknowledge that the test is to enable their participation in personal activities and is not covered by insurance.
- Tests conducted at practices that use LabCorp—including most of our Mount Sinai Doctors Faculty Practice and Network sites—are not yet included in Excelsior Pass.

Travel Policy Updates

As of tomorrow, Thursday, April 1, we are able to ease some restrictions on domestic travel for employees. You no longer need to quarantine when you return from travel outside New York and our neighboring states. However, New York State Department of Health guidance is clear that all staff will need to be tested within 24 hours of returning from a domestic trip, and then again on day four. This applies to all staff, regardless of vaccination status. Our full policy can be found [here](#), and here are some important highlights:

- All staff who are returning from domestic travel to any state or territory outside New York and its contiguous states (New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, or Vermont) must get a PCR COVID-19 test within 24 hours of their return and again on day four.
- No quarantine is needed. Asymptomatic staff are allowed to return to work while they await the test results.
- In addition, staff do not need to register their domestic travel with Employee Health Services.
- These rules do not apply to international travel. After international travel, staff must still quarantine for seven days and be tested between days three and five, or else quarantine for 10 days.

Two Discussions to Watch

Will life ever go back to normal? That was a final question in a fascinating interview on the 92nd Street Y site with Miriam Merad, MD, PhD, the Mount Sinai Professor in Cancer Immunology and Director of the Precision Immunology Institute. You can watch it [here](#).

Dr. Merad answers a host of questions about the development of COVID-19 vaccines, their safety, and their efficacy against the new variants. She ends with this thought: “I’m an optimist because I’m an immunologist, and the immune systems always win. So my answer is yes, we will go back to normal.” Though this will happen much sooner, she says, if as many people as possible get vaccinated against COVID-19.

Also recently, in a virtual Aspen Ideas Festival event, Dr. Davis interviewed Scott Gottlieb, MD, the Mount Sinai trustee and former head of the Food and Drug Administration, about where we are in the pandemic and what effect the new variants will have on its course. You can watch the conversation [here](#).

World Health Day at Lincoln Center

Next Wednesday, April 7, is World Health Day, and Lincoln Center will be celebrating with a special outdoor performance for health care workers and their families by members of the New York Philharmonic. Seating will be in socially distanced pods of two people. You can reserve your pod [here](#). You must complete a screening before arrival and pass a temperature check at the entrance.

One More Tip of the CAP

For the last several weeks, as you know, we’ve been holding “Tip of the CAP” events for employees at our sites to connect with their colleagues, appreciate their hard work, and pause to take time for themselves. The latest video rounding up these events from around the Health System is [here](#).

I’ve really enjoyed seeing you all take a moment for yourselves and some time to recharge, and I hope you’ve enjoyed it as well. But starting next week, we’ll be changing how often we hold them, so please watch your email for updates from your local leadership. This doesn’t mean we appreciate you any less; quite the contrary. It remains

the highest honor and privilege of my life to work beside you and support the remarkable efforts you put in.

Vicki R. LoPachin, MD, MBA

Senior Vice President

Chief Medical Officer

Mount Sinai Health System