

## COVID-19 Health System Updates, January 20

January 20, 2021, Wednesday

I hope you had a good long weekend and were able to take time to reflect on the life, legacy, and teachings of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. And I hope you were able to get some rest. Over the weekend, we got a small bit of good news: we have resumed getting some COVID-19 vaccines that we can offer to our patients.

It is not enough for all who want it, but it is enough to keep our appointments for the second half of this week on the schedule, and to reschedule some of the patients we had to cancel over the past weekend. We are contacting those patients as we confirm that we now have enough vaccine for them. It will take some time to get through the backlog, but we are working on it. If you have a loved one in that group, please encourage them to check their phone or MyChart messages regularly.

Our highest priority is still to vaccinate our Mount Sinai faculty, staff, trainees, and students, including our voluntary physicians and their patient-facing staff. The state has assured us that we will always have enough vaccine for each of you. But the current constraints on supply mean we have to plan ahead carefully for each dose. This means that if you want to get vaccinated, it's important to make an appointment, rather than walk in, if at all possible, so that we can forecast our daily needs accurately. If you work onsite at a Mount Sinai facility, or if you work remotely and are 65 or over, you can make a vaccination appointment [here](#). Employees of our voluntary practices should use [this form](#).

Also, I want to reiterate that anyone—employee or patient—who received their first dose of vaccine through Mount Sinai will get their second dose through us as well.

I'm very happy to say that we've now vaccinated more than two-thirds of the staff who are eligible. That means that if you're still trying to make up your mind, there is probably someone working alongside you who chose to be vaccinated and can tell you what it was like. Please reach out to them, or to anyone in leadership, if you have any questions. You can also find answers on our [public](#) and [employee](#) vaccine pages.

As of this morning, we had 517 COVID-19-positive inpatients in our hospitals, 83 of whom were in critical care. These numbers continue to increase at a steady but not alarming rate. We are still able to accommodate the surge by transferring patients between our hospitals to balance the load, by creating more surge space, and by carefully managing our procedural volume.

### **Meet Our COVID-19 Scientists**

Most of us have heard that a new variant of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, has appeared with some frequency in Great Britain and was recently reported for the first time in New York City. Viviana Simon, MD, PhD, Professor of Microbiology, and Medicine (Infectious Diseases), says, “The new variant, known as B.1.1.7., shows some evidence of being more transmissible, but no evidence of being more deadly.” She believes that the COVID-19 vaccines will be effective against the B.1.1.7 variant, as well as other variants, because they prompt the body to make antibodies against different regions of the spike protein that the virus uses to enter cells.

Mount Sinai’s Pathogen Surveillance Program has been tracking the evolution of SARS-CoV-2 through genetic sequencing since the beginning of the pandemic, with an expert team that includes Emilia Mia Sordillo, MD, PhD, Associate Professor of Pathology, Molecular and Cell-Based Medicine, and Harm van Bakel, PhD, Assistant Professor of Genetics and Genomic Sciences, in addition to Dr. Simon. The team has produced a series of firsts: for example, finding last spring that the first wave of COVID-19 in New York City could be traced back to viral strains circulating in Europe.

Our understanding of the virus and its variants is growing, but meanwhile, Dr. van Bakel has some basic advice: “Wearing face masks, maintaining social distancing, and observing all of the measures that have been put in place to protect oneself, as well as others, are still the most effective ways to control the spread of the virus until vaccines are more broadly available,” he says. “Adhering to these guidelines will be effective, regardless of the variant that is circulating.”

You can read more about the new variant [here](#).

During this long second surge of COVID-19, our patients and our communities remain enormously grateful for our work. Each patient we heal is someone who can go home to their loved ones again, can participate in a child’s wedding or graduation, can connect

with their friends again, can take care of an elderly parent, and can breathe a sigh of relief at just being alive.

Michael Chuck, a patient profiled this week by the [Daily News](#), can see again, thanks to the dedicated surgical teams at New York Eye and Ear Infirmary of Mount Sinai. “They’re my heroes right now,” he told the paper.

You—all of you—are my heroes, right now and forever. I can never thank you enough for what you do. It will always be the honor of my life to wear the Mount Sinai badge with you.

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