

COVID-19 Health System Updates

July 8, 2020, Wednesday

As we head into the heart of the summer, I want us all to take a timeout and talk about masks.

I know you've already heard a lot about them, from me and others. You know that it is Mount Sinai Health System policy that you must fully cover your mouth and nose with a Mount Sinai-issued surgical mask when you enter and leave our campuses, and when you are in our public areas, corridors, and elevators.

And most of you are doing a fine job with your masks. Just as I wear my mask for you, you wear your mask for me. I thank you for that. But there are some who still aren't wearing masks all the time, or not wearing them properly.

We all work in health care. In health care, we follow the science. And the science about mask-wearing is clear: Wearing masks slows the spread of COVID-19 and saves lives. One peer-reviewed study in *Health Affairs* compared states with mandatory masking orders to those without. It found statistically significant declines in the daily COVID-19 case growth rate and projected that between 230,000 and 450,000 cases had been avoided by these orders.

Why does mask-wearing help? Mainly because it keeps people who have SARS-CoV-2—the virus that causes COVID-19—from spreading it to the people around them. We know that many people with COVID-19 can spread it while asymptomatic or presymptomatic. (Here is a roundup of studies on this point.) The CDC is currently recommending that every person who is able to wear a face covering should wear one in common areas, and the CDC website has a long list of studies supporting this recommendation.

I know masks aren't easy for everyone to wear. You may think that it's hard to breathe while wearing one, or that it makes you feel sweaty in the summer heat, or that your glasses fog up. These are all sincerely felt concerns, and over the next several weeks, we'll address each of them on Mount Sinai's digital news site, *Mount Sinai Today*. As a reminder, our COVID-19 Employee Resources website is here. And if you have a concern that we don't address, you can always email CovidQuestions@mountsinai.org. We want to hear you, and we want to set your fears and concerns to rest.

I also know that many of us want to do the right thing, but during a busy day, sometimes we slip, or forget. Let's make mask-wearing the same as hand hygiene. If you see a colleague not wearing a mask properly—fully covering the nose and mouth—gently remind them. It's for everybody's good.

Our COVID-19 numbers continue to be among the lowest we've seen, with 45 admitted inpatients across the system. We can all be grateful and proud about that. But we've all seen what is happening in other states, and we can't let that happen here. The most important thing we can do, as health care workers and New Yorkers, is to properly wear our masks whenever they're required and encourage others to do the same.

I will wear my mask for you. Please wear yours for me. Together, we will get through this.

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