

# COVID-19 Health System Updates

November 25, 2020, Wednesday

I hope you all saw the [Thanksgiving message](#) that Dr. Davis and Dr. Charney sent out earlier this week. They thanked you—as I want to thank you—for a truly outstanding effort this year against COVID-19. You saved, and continue to save, thousands of lives. New York would not be the same without all of you and the extraordinary work you have done.

I wish I could send you off to your Thanksgiving holiday only on an encouraging note, but there is no break from COVID-19. Cases continue to rise across our Health System, across our region, and across the country. But the current caseload is still within our projections, and well within our ability to handle. Our COVID-19 inpatient census remains at less than 10 percent of what we saw at the peak in the spring. And we do not believe we will ever see anything close to those prior numbers.

We are coping with the increases that we are seeing in part by opening additional surge space and transferring patients among our hospitals so that they can get the best care while we balance the load and the work across the system. This week, I want to particularly thank the Department of Rehabilitation and Human Performance for prioritizing Mount Sinai Morningside and Mount Sinai West as sites for its patients so that we can free up space at The Mount Sinai Hospital for more COVID-19 patients.

I also want to thank Mount Sinai Heart for their flexibility in moving elective catheterization procedures from Mount Sinai Morningside to Mount Sinai Beth Israel. This will not only balance the workload among campuses but also allow us to accelerate an equipment upgrade at the Morningside cath lab, so it is truly a win-win.

My deepest appreciation to everyone, in these departments and beyond, for their cooperation. It shows that we are an integrated Health System and not just a collection of hospitals. We are so much stronger when we work together.

Our challenge right now is to work together to stop the further spread of this virus. As I said, there is no break from COVID-19, and that includes in our own break rooms. But rather than keep lecturing about this, let's put some Mount Sinai spirit into it. So we are announcing a contest for the best short video demonstrating break-room safety.

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 best of all: Dancing is encouraged! (But not required.)

As of this morning, we have 157 COVID-19-positive inpatients in our hospitals, 25 of whom are in critical care. The New York State seven-day average test positivity rates stood yesterday at 2.5 percent for New York City, 3.2 percent for Long Island, and 3.9 percent for the Mid-Hudson region, all flat to slightly up from last week.

### **Update on Testing**

We know that many of you want to be able to get tested for COVID-19 without having symptoms. We have added new locations for nasal swab (PCR) and antibody testing, which are listed [here](#). There is also an [FAQ document](#) with answers to many common questions. We are working to make more testing available and will keep you posted.

### **Update on Vaccines**

Our vaccine planning committee, led by Susan Mashni, PharmD, continues planning for the arrival of one or more COVID-19 vaccines, which could come as early as mid-December. We know you'll have lots of questions, and we still do not have all the answers, especially about which groups will be offered the vaccine first and what the process and rules will be. We need to receive more guidance from the federal, state, and city governments before issues like that can be decided. But we do know more now about the vaccines themselves, and have published some [FAQs on our website](#) about vaccines generally and the new COVID-19 vaccines that you may find informative.

### **Don't Forget Your Flu Shot**

And while we wait for the COVID-19 vaccine, it's important to remember that the flu is still a danger as well, especially as winter approaches. Getting your flu shot will not only help protect you, your colleagues, and your loved ones, but it can also help decrease flu-related visits to clinics and emergency rooms—places that could become overwhelmed by COVID-19 patients if the current surge continues.

Influenza vaccination is still available through Employee Health Services (EHS) [by appointment](#). A list of vaccination events (pods) is [on the intranet](#). If you were vaccinated anywhere other than through Mount Sinai EHS, please email documentation to [employee.health@mountsinai.org](mailto:employee.health@mountsinai.org) or to the contacts for the local EHS sites listed on the [intranet](#).

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

Young people who get COVID-19 often show no symptoms and can spread the virus to roommates and others even during a strict quarantine. That is the finding of a study led by Stuart Sealon, MD, the Sara B. and Seth M. Glickenhau Professor of Neurology, and just published in [The New England Journal of Medicine](#). In the study, researchers from Mount Sinai and the Naval Medical Research Center looked at COVID-19 transmission among 1,848 Marine recruits who were under quarantines between May and July. They found that few infected recruits showed symptoms of COVID-19, and

diagnoses were made only by scheduled tests, not by tests performed in response to the daily temperature checks and symptom screening.

“If you rely only on testing, you are going to miss cases and the virus will escape, and if you just use public health measures it’s not going to be sufficient,” Dr. Sealfon says. “If you do both of them together, you should be able to control this highly infectious virus. We hope this information helps in developing more effective measures to keep military installations and schools safe.” Read more [here](#).

As we head into the holidays, there can be little doubt that more hard work lies ahead. We know that many people will ignore the warnings and gather unsafely with their families tomorrow, and that the patients with new COVID-19 infections resulting from those gatherings will arrive in our hospitals in the next few weeks. So it’s even more important that we all take some down time this holiday weekend—to relax, recharge, and prepare for the work ahead.

Whatever you do tomorrow and for the rest of the weekend, please do it safely. Your family needs you, your colleagues need you, and your patients need you, now more than ever.

From the bottom of my heart, I wish you a happy Thanksgiving.

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