

COVID-19 Health System Updates

October 14, 2020, Wednesday

Our uptick in COVID-19 cases continues this week. The numbers remain well short of where they were from March through May, and we still don't expect things to get anywhere near as bad as they were then.

Nevertheless, if you're working in our emergency departments or on some of our inpatient units—especially at The Mount Sinai Hospital, Mount Sinai Brooklyn, and Mount Sinai Queens, where we've seen most of the recent cases—you might have a familiar feeling of concern, especially after a couple of months of relative quiet on the COVID-19 front.

So I want to begin by saluting everyone who has been treating our latest wave of COVID-19 patients, everywhere across the Health System. You are still our health care heroes, as you have been all along. Know that you have the entire Mount Sinai Health System supporting you, and I'm confident that we will once again meet the challenge.

We have been extensively preparing for this, and the work continues. We have identified enough surge space to let us care for much more than the current number of COVID-19 patients without affecting routine non-COVID-19 care at any of our sites. We have warehouses full of PPE and other supplies, including many month's supply of N-95 masks, gowns, gloves, and the like. We're ready.

You know this—but reminders never hurt: **COVID-19 is a preventable disease**. And we want to make especially sure that you don't catch it, or give it to someone else, here at Mount Sinai. So, please, wear your Mount Sinai-issued mask anytime you're in our facilities; perform hand hygiene frequently; and maintain social distancing at all times, including in break rooms, and even if you're wearing a mask. For those of you who missed it last week, the full Mount Sinai Health System Code of Conduct is [here](#). Everyone must abide by—and every manager must enforce—these rules. As much as I

hate to say so, if you refuse to follow the masking policy, we may have to send you home without pay for the rest of your shift.

We are also stepping up enforcement of the attestation requirement. At some of our facilities, we will be checking each employee on arrival to confirm that you are symptom-free and have filled out the attestation. Other sites may perform these checks on the units. Your hospital leadership will let you know the details, including which entrance(s) to use. Remember that you can fill out the attestation online or on your smartphone before arriving. Instructions for doing so, and for adding a convenient shortcut to your phone's home screen, are attached to this email. Please also remember that whether or not someone is checking at the door, you need to fill out the attestation every day before starting a work shift onsite.

We're doing all these things for an important reason:

Studies have found that about 40 percent of positive COVID-19 polymerase chain reaction (nasal swab) tests are in people who are asymptomatic or presymptomatic. And there is increasing anecdotal evidence that a small percentage of people can get COVID-19 twice. So even if you have SARS-CoV-2 antibodies, and even if you feel fine and do not believe you have been exposed, it's important to protect yourselves, your families, your colleagues, and your patients by masking and social distancing whenever you are outside your house. Especially here at work.

As of this morning, we have 111 COVID-19 inpatients in our hospitals.

Testing a Vaccine, Equitably

Mount Sinai is taking the lead in trials of COVID-19 vaccines, including the phase 3 trial of Pfizer's vaccine, one of the furthest along in development. We are also taking the lead in another crucial part of our mission—working toward health equity. “Communities should not be overlooked due to assumptions that people of color are unwilling to enroll in clinical trials,” says Judith Aberg, MD, the Dr. George Baehr Professor of Clinical Medicine, and principal investigator of multiple COVID-19 prevention and treatment trials here at Mount Sinai. “Such false assumptions result in harmful health disparities.” Seeking a diverse pool of participants, Mount Sinai teams have been actively recruiting

people of color, including making visits to grocery stores, hair salons, laundromats, and restaurants all around East Harlem. As Program Manager Debbie Lucy says, “We want to make sure the trials are representative of the people who were hardest hit by COVID-19.” You can view a video on the trials [here](#), and read about an inspiring volunteer [here](#). And if you have questions about enrolling, email covidtrialsinfo@mountsinai.org.

Study of Antibodies in Health Care Workers

The Personalized Virology Initiative (PVI) at Mount Sinai is conducting a research study to understand the durability and effectiveness of COVID-19 antibodies in health care workers at the Mount Sinai Health System. Participation in the study, which is led by Viviana Simon, MD, PhD, involves answering surveys and giving blood and saliva samples over time to measure antibodies and look for potential reinfection. In accordance with regulatory approvals, the PVI team will share the antibody results with participants from approved clinical tests and can also do molecular testing if there is concern regarding a potential exposure or an upper respiratory tract infection. If you are interested in learning about your antibody response to COVID-19 and participating in this study, please contact our team at 212-241-7393 or virology@mssm.edu.

Take Some “You Time”

Many of us have had little or no break since the crisis in the spring, and the uncertainty of what’s to come may be weighing on us. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the significant fatigue and stress so many of us feel. Those of us in health care are in this profession because of our desire to help others, but we all know that to best take care of others, we need to care for ourselves too. I urge you to make time for rest on days off and use your personal time off (PTO) to relax and recharge. Even with the current uptick in cases, we will work hard to accommodate PTO requests and will be as flexible as we can. Because we know how important it is.

Let me conclude by assuring you that we are all in this together, and we will support each other at each step of the way. Our [wellness resources](#) are available to anyone who may need support on a personal level, and you can always email us at COVIDQuestions@mountsinai.org if you have any questions or needs related to your

job or work area. We will continue to do everything possible to support you through the times ahead. We will succeed at this challenge—I know we will, because we wear the Mount Sinai badge so proudly together.

Vicki R. LoPachin, MD, MBA

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