



Mount
Sinai
South
Nassau

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Healthy Outlook

a health and wellness newsletter

Stepping Up to Take the COVID-19 Vaccine

For nearly two decades, Lynbrook resident Theresa Clarke's friends have been as close as family. The Nurse Manager of Oncology and Infusion Services' circle of tight-knit friends have helped fill a void in her life since she immigrated to the United States from Jamaica, where her parents and cousins still live.

During the height of the pandemic, though, the nurse practitioner was devastated to learn that four members of her friend's family, who were convinced that COVID-19 was a hoax, sadly passed away from the virus.

"I said to myself, if I can play a part in not having that happen [transmitting the virus], I will take that step to get vaccinated so I can set an example for my family and friends and for the communities of color who are disproportionately affected by this virus," Ms. Clarke said.

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Photo Credit: Newsday/Alejandra Villa Loarca

On December 15, 2020, **Theresa Clarke, RN**, was among the first Mount Sinai South Nassau employees to get the COVID-19 vaccine.



Protect Yourself from Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Although the COVID-19 vaccine rollout has been underway for more than two months, the campaign to vaccinate Americans got off to a slow start. A limited supply of coronavirus vaccines, coupled with distribution delays, have hampered the federal and state effort.

But even if you already have gotten your first or second dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna vaccines, you will still need to practice pandemic precautions. It will take at least several months to vaccinate everyone who wants the vaccine or until enough people in a community are immune to the virus.

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A Message from

Richard J. Murphy,

President and CEO

Compassionate Leadership During the COVID-19 Crisis

COVID-19 has overshadowed much of our lives for nearly a year, and while we have learned a great deal about preventing, diagnosing and treating the virus, there is still much to learn. Each day, news reports are filled with the latest COVID-related developments: new strains emerging in Europe and elsewhere; emerging insights into the symptoms associated with COVID-19 as well as new treatment recommendations; information about the so-called “long-haulers” who suffer with symptoms for months after recovering; and more recently, questions about vaccines. Are they safe? Are they effective? Most urgently, when and where can I get one?

Even with vaccine availability, COVID-19 remains a highly contagious and deadly virus. Until we as a nation are able to vaccinate more than 70 percent of the population, it is extremely important that we continue to observe the protocols recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to prevent transmission: practice social distancing, wear masks, wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soapy water, use hand sanitizer when soap and water are unavailable, and avoid crowds.

Mount Sinai South Nassau has emerged as a leader during this crisis. In the early spring of 2020, our health care heroes did an admirable job caring for hundreds of patients who were suffering from the most serious COVID-19 complications. As the infection rate began to increase again in the fall, our team stood ready to respond, employing the knowledge we had gained and using the latest science to offer our community the highest quality of care. Once the vaccine became available, we mounted a coordinated effort to vaccinate our front-line health care workers and, within the limits of availability, our community as well.

At the same time, we continued to provide the essential health care services that our community relies upon for heart disease, cancer, orthopedic issues, and the range of other health-related challenges that affect men, women and children in our service area.

This issue of *Healthy Outlook* is dedicated to the virus that remains our nation's most significant health threat. Within these pages you will find the latest, most credible information on COVID-19. Please use this publication as a resource to guide you and your family through these turbulent times and know that Mount Sinai South Nassau will continue to be here, ready to care for you and those you love, throughout and beyond this pandemic.

We will get through this crisis together. ■



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Oceanside, NY 11572-1551**

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COVID-19 Vaccination Information and Resources

Frequently Asked Questions About COVID-19 Vaccines



Aaron E. Glatt, MD, Chair of the Department of Medicine and Chief of Infectious Diseases at Mount Sinai South Nassau, answers commonly asked questions and concerns about the safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccines.

Q | Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe?

Clinical trials have shown that the vaccines are 95 percent effective and can be administered with very few side effects. In two large studies, tens of thousands of participants received the vaccines, not including those who got a placebo. More than 40 million others—hospital workers, first responders, and community health workers who meet the guidelines of their local public health agencies—have now also received the vaccine, with very few negative reactions reported.

The FDA reviews all vaccines for safety before allowing them onto the market. In New York State, the governor's Clinical Advisory task force also offered an independent opinion about each vaccine's safety and efficacy. This task force, which includes highly respected scientists like Adolfo García-Sastre, PhD, Irene and Dr. Arthur M. Fishberg Professor of Medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, reviewed the data independently and unanimously recommended approval of the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines.

At press time, Johnson & Johnson's (J&J) Janssen Biotech subsidiary also had submitted an application to the Food and Drug Administration asking for emergency use authorization (EUA) for its single-dose COVID-19 vaccine. All the preliminary data (published or made available for analysis) are very positive, suggesting it will receive approval from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices and EUA.

It is expected that 100 million doses will be delivered for use in the United States by the summer. The vaccine's ease of administration and delivery will make it an important factor in getting almost all adults in the United States immunized by the summer.

Q | How will vaccines be distributed?

Public health authorities recommend who should be offered the vaccine first. Mount Sinai follows these recommendations and will not be able to make exceptions to them.

High-risk health care workers, residents and staff of nursing homes, and other long-term care facilities, were at the front of the line to receive the vaccine, according to the Department of Health. Since then, the list has been expanded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to include first responders, teachers, and other essential workers, people over 65, and others with compromised immune systems.

As more vaccine is distributed, it will be offered to additional groups of people.

Q | Will taking this vaccine give me COVID-19?

No. Neither the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, nor the Moderna vaccines contain the live virus that causes COVID-19. The vaccines cannot make you sick with the coronavirus.

Q | Are we taking the federal government's word for it that a vaccine is safe?

No. The Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices (ACIP), a group of medical and public health experts that advises the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), also assesses the safety and efficacy of vaccines.

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They also developed recommendations on COVID-19 vaccine use. Additionally, in New York State, the governor's Clinical Advisory task force independently reviews the vaccines as they are made available.

Q | What do we know about the side effects of the vaccines?

Like all vaccines, the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines can cause side effects. These rarely interfere with daily activities, and often go away with over-the-counter pain medications. It is common to have these side effects after a vaccination. They mean your immune system is working and making antibodies as it's supposed to.

The following side effects to the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are very common, meaning that they may affect more than 1 in 10 people, but they are generally short-lived.

- pain at injection site
- fatigue
- headache
- muscle pain
- chills
- joint pain
- fever

Q | How many shots do I have to get if I want to be protected against COVID-19?

Some of the vaccines that are being developed—including the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines—require two doses three to four weeks apart. It is very important that you get both doses at the recommended times. However, you can take the vaccine after the recommended times with no decrease in efficacy. Do not be concerned if the second dose is delayed.



Aaron E. Glatt, MD, Chair of Medicine and Chief of Infectious Diseases at Mount Sinai South Nassau, receives a second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Q | Should I take the vaccine if I am pregnant or considering pregnancy?

We know that the vaccine does not cross the placenta, and there is no evidence that it impacts pregnant women or fertility. What's more, there is no live or inactivated virus in the vaccine, and it cannot cause any genetic changes.

The American Society of Reproductive Medicine, the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology, and many other expert medical groups say that pregnancy is NOT a reason not to take the vaccine.

Q | Is it safe to take the vaccine if I am allergic to nuts, shellfish, and iodine?

There's no clinical evidence that people with mild allergies need to avoid the vaccine. The American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology released guidance stating that people with common allergies are no more likely than the general public to have an allergic reaction to the Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines.

Q | Should I take the vaccine if I have severe allergies?

Do not get the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine if you have had a severe allergic reaction (i.e., anaphylaxis) to vaccines or the components of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

If you have a history of severe allergies to other medication, please discuss with your health care provider.

Q | If I already had COVID-19, should I get vaccinated?

Yes. If you have had COVID-19 and recovered, it is possible to be re-infected with the coronavirus. The Center for Disease Control recommends you wait 90 days after you have received a positive COVID-19 test to get vaccinated. While most people are protected from getting COVID-19 again after they've recovered, we don't know how long that protection lasts.

Q | If I get vaccinated, can I stop wearing masks and social distancing?

If you get a vaccine, you should still protect yourself by wearing a mask and social distancing. It is possible, for example, that the vaccine will protect you from getting very sick with the virus, but it will not prevent you from spreading the virus to other people. Until we have a better idea of that and know how many people are going to receive it, you should still practice social distancing, wear a face mask, and wash your hands often and well.



Joe Montilli, former Chief of the Lawrence-Cedarhurst Fire Department, receives a COVID-19 vaccine on December 23.

Q | How well do the first vaccines work?

The FDA reports that the vaccine made by Pfizer/BioNTech had an efficacy rate of 95 percent. That means that under the controlled conditions of the company's phase 3 trial, there were 95 percent fewer cases of COVID-19 in the group of people who got the vaccine compared to the group of people who got the placebo.

A second vaccine, made by Moderna, also has an efficacy rate of 94 to 95 percent, according to data released by the company.

These are very high efficacy numbers, meaning the vaccines worked well in these trials.

Q | How do the COVID-19 vaccines work?

Most vaccines work by exposing us to pieces of either a bacteria or a virus. Our body mounts an immune response by making antibodies against those pieces. Antibodies are proteins that fight germs like viruses and bacteria by latching onto and disabling them. The goal is that our body will then recognize those pieces and use the

antibodies to fight off any future exposure to the real bacteria or virus.

However, the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are called "messenger RNA" vaccines. They do not contain pieces or proteins from the virus. Instead, they contain instructions for your cells, called "messenger RNA." This messenger RNA tells your cells to make the COVID-19 spike protein themselves. Once your cells make the spike protein, your immune system will make the antibodies that fight COVID-19 and protect you from getting sick from this virus.

Q | What is herd immunity and when will it be reached?

Herd immunity means that enough people in a community are immune to a disease and that the disease cannot spread easily among them. For COVID-19, herd immunity can be reached if between 70 and 90 percent of the population is vaccinated. This will allow us all to begin to resume normal lives. The vaccines could save thousands of lives in the United States and millions worldwide. But it only will be effective if enough people believe in the science instead of baseless rumors and misinformation surrounding the vaccine rollout.

Q | I've heard some really hard-to-understand things about COVID-19 vaccines. How can I find out if they're true?

There are a lot of myths circulating in social media about COVID-19 vaccines. If you've heard something that sounds questionable and want to know if it's true or not, you can look it up in NewsGuard's report on the top COVID-19 vaccine myths. **Visit newsguardtech.com/special-report-top-covid-19-vaccine-myths/.**

› Eager to Receive the COVID-19 Vaccine continued from page 1

On December 15, she made good on her promise and rolled up her sleeve to receive her first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Since then, thousands of Ms. Clarke's colleagues at the hospital, community health workers, first responders, people over 65, and others with compromised immune systems—individuals who meet the eligibility requirements for vaccination—have lined up to receive shots in their arms.

"The vaccine is an important barrier to prevent the spread of the virus," said Ms. Clarke, who took her second COVID-19 vaccination on January 6. "It is another tool

along with masking, social distancing, and hand washing."

As Long Island and the nation face the emergence of new coronavirus strains, experts say vaccination is critical.

"The vaccine has proven to be safe and effective. I urge everyone to take it once it becomes more widely available to the public," said Aaron E. Glatt, MD, Chair of Medicine and Chief of Infectious Diseases at Mount Sinai South Nassau. "It's the only hope we have to get out of this pandemic."

After Ms. Clarke received her first and second doses of the COVID-19 vaccine,

"The vaccine has proven to be safe and effective. I urge everyone to take it once it becomes more widely available to the public. It's the only hope we have to get out of this pandemic."

—Dr. Aaron E. Glatt

she said her only side effect was arm soreness. "I did my research," she said. "I live by medicine and evidence-based data, and if science says the vaccine is safe, it's safe." ■

› Protect yourself from COVID-19 continued from page 1

Follow these steps to reduce your chances of being infected or spreading COVID-19:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, if soap and water are not available
- Avoid close contact with sick people
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or your elbow
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Wear a face mask when around others. You could spread COVID-19 to others even if you do not feel sick

How to properly wear a face mask:

- It should cover your mouth and nose
- It should be snug but comfortable against the sides of your face
- It should be secured with ties or ear loops
- It should be made with multiple layers of material
- It must allow you to breathe without restriction
- Disposable masks should be thrown away after each use



- Before, during and after you prepare and eat food
- Before and after contact with an ill person
- After using the toilet or changing diapers
- Before and after treating a cut, sore, or wound
- After touching animals or animal waste
- After touching garbage, body fluids, or anytime you doubt if your hands are clean



Six Feet Or More

Coronavirus spreads mainly among people who are in close contact with each other for prolonged periods of time. Since people can spread the virus before they begin to feel sick, it is important to keep at least 6 feet away from others (physical distancing) as much as possible. It also means avoiding large gatherings. But by doing this now, we hope we can all get back to getting together with family and friends soon. ■



When to wash your hands:

- After you have been in public and touched a surface that is frequently touched by others (like door handles, shopping carts, electronic cash registers/screens, etc.)
- Before and after touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- When entering or exiting your home
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing

Testing Information for COVID-19

There are many reasons to get tested for the coronavirus. You may be experiencing one of several COVID-19 symptoms (ranging from cough and fever to diarrhea and loss of smell or taste). Or you may feel fine, but you've been in contact with someone who has a possible or confirmed case. You may also need a COVID-19 test to comply with the many regulations in place, such as work policies and travel advisories.

How to Get a COVID-19 Test

If you have no symptoms of COVID-19, but need a test, contact your primary care provider or find a New York State test site near you.

If you believe you have mild symptoms of the coronavirus, or if you have been exposed to someone who tested positive for the virus, you can schedule an appointment at Mount Sinai South Nassau's drive-through rapid COVID-19 testing site located at the hospital's Washington Ave. entrance.

- Testing will be provided **by appointment only** between 8 am and 4 pm, Monday to Friday, and Saturday, from 7 to 11 am
- To schedule an appointment for a test, call 516-390-2888 Monday – Friday, from 7:30 am to 6 pm, and Saturdays, from 8 am to 12 pm
- Individuals 17 or younger must have written consent or be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian to be tested

If you have a procedure scheduled at Mount Sinai South Nassau, please work directly with your physician to schedule your presurgical COVID-19 test.

Beyond COVID-19 tests, which detect a current infection, Mount Sinai South Nassau also provides a COVID-19 antibody test, which is a blood test to determine if you have been infected with the coronavirus in the past. Please contact your Mount Sinai South Nassau primary care provider to schedule an appointment.

Are you Gripped by Pandemic Fatigue?

As the pandemic drags on, many of us are emotionally exhausted from coping with the threat of coronavirus. We're tired of balancing the demands of our jobs and children's remote education, losing our appetite for regular handwashing, lax about wiping down high-touch surfaces, and weary of masking up and avoiding indoor gatherings. Some of us may even feel helpless, sad, hopeless, or afraid.

Janet Kahn-Scolaro, PhD, Administrative Director of Mount Sinai South Nassau's Behavioral Health, Internal and Family Medicine Services, says it's important to be aware of what triggers personal stress during these challenging times and recommends the following coping tips.



Get enough sleep



Eat a healthy and balanced diet



Exercise. Participate in regular physical activity. Walk, practice yoga, or dance



Stick to a daily routine; it forms the basis of creating a balanced and focused life



Limit caffeine and drink alcohol in moderation. Alcohol is a depressant



Stay connected with loved ones and friends through technology



Practice mindfulness, relax and recharge. Living in the present moment has numerous benefits. Studies suggest that mindfulness calms the nervous system, reduces stress, and sharpens focus

Get help when you need it.

Contact Mount Sinai South Nassau's Behavioral Health Center at 516-377-5400 and ask about appointment options.

Seeking Treatment for COVID-19

If you think you may have COVID-19, and have respiratory symptoms, such as coughing or difficulty breathing, or if you have had contact with a person who has COVID-19, call ahead to one of Mount Sinai South Nassau's outpatient ambulatory facilities.

It is especially important to wear a face mask on the way to your appointment to help prevent the spread of germs. Taking these

precautions will help us contain the spread of the virus.

Patients 65 and older who were recently diagnosed with COVID-19 and have underlying medical conditions may be eligible for monoclonal antibody therapy, a treatment that is composed of laboratory-made proteins that mimic the immune system's ability to fight harmful bacteria and viruses. Call 516-632-4998 for more information.



However, if you develop life-threatening conditions like severe shortness of breath, changes in mental status, severe dehydration, or other complications, don't hesitate to dial 911.



Please reduce, reuse, and recycle

Where to get the COVID-19 vaccine

COVID-19 vaccine scheduling can be accessed via the website of the hospital or pharmacy dispensing the vaccine. Mount Sinai South Nassau is issued a site-specific link from the New York State Department of Health (DOH) that applies to our site appointments **only when vaccine is available**. We will announce the release of available appointments on the Mount Sinai South Nassau home page at southnassau.org, and post the corresponding link(s) to the DOH site on our website.

With demand exceeding supply, the appointments often fully book within minutes of being added to the DOH site. We encourage eligible individuals to visit the Mount Sinai South Nassau home page regularly to obtain the most current DOH site link for appointments. Once you access the DOH site, it can be helpful to refresh the appointments page (Ctrl-R or Cmd-R) multiple times per hour or day. If no link is present, either on the hospital's site or the DOH site, it means that no vaccine is currently available to make appointments.

You can check your eligibility to receive the vaccine at am-i-eligible.covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov. Appropriate



work ID and/or proof of age and address must be presented at the time of your vaccine; your appointment will be forfeited if your eligibility cannot be documented.

If you do not have Internet access, you can call the New York State Department of Health at 833-NYS-4-VAX (833-697-4829).

To find a doctor, visit mountsinai.org/southnassau.

The information provided in this newsletter is for educational purposes only and should not be used as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Except where noted, models are used in photos and their appearance here is not reflective of a specific disease profile. Some photos were taken prior to the COVID pandemic. Our practitioners and patients are required to wear appropriate PPE at all times.

Read *Healthy Outlook* online at mountsinai.org/southnassau.

