Learning to Live With COVID-19
From pandemic to endemic COVID-19

Experts say COVID-19 is here to stay. Instead of fizzling out, the COVID-19 virus is expected to circulate in the population indefinitely, shifting from a pandemic to an endemic.

When will this happen? Infectious disease experts say it is still too early to tell. But when it does transition, there will be less transmission of disease, and cases in vaccinated or previously infected “healthy” people could be mild.

“If we have a tremendous number of new variants like Omicron that can cause widespread infection even in the ‘immune’ population, then it’s potentially going to be a constant problem,” said Aaron E. Glatt, MD, Chair of Medicine and Chief of Infectious Diseases at Mount Sinai South Nassau. “However, with major segments of the population having developed immunity through vaccination, infection, or a combination of both, COVID-19 infections will occur on an irregular basis. While there will be sporadic pockets of infection every now and then, especially in people who haven’t been vaccinated or exposed to COVID-19 in the past, most people will not develop serious illness.”

continued on page 2

Are COVID-19 Vaccines More Protective Than “Natural” Immunity?

If you have recovered from a COVID-19 infection, does your “natural” immunity offer stronger and longer lasting immunity against reinfection?

“This has been an area where we do not have definitive answers, although more pieces of the puzzle have been advanced almost every day,” said Aaron E. Glatt, MD, Chair of the Department of Medicine and Chief of Infectious Diseases at Mount Sinai South Nassau. “Based upon published data by the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), two vaccines and natural immunity both provide significant protection against prior strains (pre-Omicron) of COVID-19. However, those who are doubly vaccinated with an mRNA vaccine and

continued on page 2
Considered a major step forward in the treatment of COVID-19 is the emergence of antiviral pills for patients who are at risk of hospitalization and death from severe COVID-19. The oral medication, Paxlovid, which has emergency approval, must be used within five days of symptom onset and can only be administered under the guidance of a physician, explained Adhi Sharma, MD, President of Mount Sinai South Nassau.

An endemic version of COVID-19 could look similar to the flu, Dr. Glatt says. But it’s also possible that it won’t. “It depends on what new strains of the virus develop,” he said. “Mutations are unpredictable, and as long as significant portions of the world remain unvaccinated and nonimmune, strains that will be of concern could develop outside the United States and spread within the country if significantly different than prior variants.”

Dr. Glatt cautioned that those with weakened immune systems, the unvaccinated, and those who have not been infected will be at higher risk for more severe disease.

While the massive Omicron surge is in the rearview mirror, Dr. Glatt cautions that New Yorkers should not let their guard down and should “trust the science—vaccines will help keep your family safe,” he said. “People must realize that if they have new respiratory symptoms, they really should not be around other people,” he added.

“The COVID-19 vaccines have proven to be highly effective at keeping most patients from getting seriously ill and hospitalized,” he said.

In addition to vaccination, Dr. Glatt recommends the following safety precautions:

- **Test** for COVID-19
- **Wash** your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds
- **Cover** your sneezes and coughs with a tissue or your elbow
- **If you feel sick, stay home**

---

**Are COVID-19 Vaccines More Protective Than “Natural” Immunity?**

boostered after five months, as well as those who were infected with COVID-19 (have natural immunity) and then had two doses of the mRNA vaccines, are the most immune.”

But this does not mean that you should intentionally expose yourself to COVID-19 so you can put the virus behind you, he says. “Attempting to bolster your immune system against COVID-19 by willfully exposing yourself to the virus is a bad idea,” Dr. Glatt cautioned. “It is an unnecessary risk with unknown consequences. It’s just too dangerous. There are many things we still do not know about the long-term effects of COVID-19 illness.”

He explained that natural immunity often occurs after infection by a virus, bacteria, or other infectious agent in the blood. One way the immune system responds is by making antibodies, which are especially important in counteracting or killing “germs.” However, there are many other mechanisms by which the immune system is activated after exposure to infectious agents.

The degree of immunity can vary significantly and is based on the severity of illness and how “healthy” your immune system is. Many illnesses and/or medications can make your immune system weaker (make you “immunocompromised”), and this will impact how successfully your body fights off invaders. Over time, acquired immunity can wane, but often the body will still be able to “remember” it was once under attack and still be able to fight off infection years or even decades later. How quickly or slowly this occurs depends on the disease and numerous other variables.

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the CDC, antibody tests are unreliable judges of immunity. Antibody tests only evaluate part of the immune system and do not measure another line of defense called T cells. “Helper T cells or T lymphocytes and other aspects of the immune system fight viral infections and boost the immune function of other cells,” explained Dr. Glatt. “Currently, there is no standardization among the commercially available tests for antibodies and they have varying degrees of sensitivity, which makes it difficult to decipher the results.”

The best line of defense against COVID-19 is vaccination. “Vaccine efficacy is not measured by how many people get sick. It’s measured by how many hospitalizations, intubations (need for a mechanical ventilator), and deaths are prevented,” he said. “By that measure, these vaccines are phenomenal. Hopefully, increased worldwide vaccination will continue to turn the tide of COVID-19 and allow life to return to ‘normal.’”
Mount Sinai South Nassau plans to bring an array of first-class specialty care—including cancer, cardiac, diabetes, and women’s health—directly to Wantagh and the surrounding communities in a modern and convenient setting that will allow patients to access dozens of Mount Sinai doctors and services all under one roof.

The new facility—at 2020 Wantagh Avenue—will include the latest in infection control measures to ensure the safety of patients, staff, and the public.

Mount Sinai South Nassau is planning to invest $35 million to renovate and convert a 60,000-square-foot building (formerly owned by Verizon) into a state-of-the-art, multi-specialty health care center. The planned medical office building will provide a wide range of ambulatory services to meet the needs of residents in eastern Nassau County, from Wantagh and Seaford to the Massapequas and beyond.

Services planned include cardiovascular care, digestive health, orthopedics, rheumatology, neurology, women’s health, cancer care, laboratory services, and radiology.

The project—which requires Town of Hempstead approval—will be an economic boost to Wantagh and the South Shore, providing more than 100 well-paying jobs as well as bring economic activity back to the long vacant site. To learn more, go to southnassau.org/wantagh.

Please support the project and let Town of Hempstead officials know you want better health care in Wantagh by signing our online petition at change.org/2020Wantagh.

### Slow-Cooker Chicken and White Bean Stew

This recipe from Mount Sinai South Nassau Executive Chef Anthony Colombo makes a hearty and comforting weeknight meal you can prepare ahead of time. Just load up the slow cooker with the ingredients in the morning, and the recipe can cook for a full day while you are working or running errands. Serve with crusty bread and a salad.

**Ingredients:**
- 1 (15-ounce) can no-salt added cannellini beans, rinsed
- 6 cups unsalted chicken broth
- 1 cup chopped yellow onion
- 1 cup sliced carrots
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh rosemary
- 1 (4 ounce) Parmesan cheese rind
- plus 2/3 cup grated Parmesan, divided
- 2 bone-in chicken breasts (1 pound each)
- 4 cups chopped kale
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon ground pepper
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ cup flat leaf parsley leaves

**Preparation:**
- **Step 1:** Combine beans, broth, onion, carrots, rosemary and Parmesan rind in a 6-quart slow cooker. Top with chicken. Cover and cook on low until the beans and vegetables are tender, 7 to 8 hours.
- **Step 2:** Transfer the chicken to a clean cutting board; let stand until cool enough to handle, about 10 minutes. Shred the chicken and discard the bones.
- **Step 3:** Return the chicken to the slow cooker and stir in kale. Cover and cook on high until the kale is tender, 20 to 30 minutes.
- **Step 4:** Stir in lemon juice, salt and pepper; discard the Parmesan rind.

Serve the stew drizzled with oil and sprinkled Parmesan and parsley.

**Servings: 6**
Is It Time for Another COVID-19 Booster?

While the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recommended a second booster or a fourth dose of the vaccine for those with a weakened immune system, what about healthy people? That is the question of the hour.

Boosters provide a high level of protection against severe disease and hospitalization, but “at this time it is impossible to predict whether additional booster doses (beyond the third booster mRNA COVID-19 vaccination) will be needed for healthy people,” said Aaron E. Glatt, MD, Chair of Medicine and Chief of Infectious Diseases at Mount Sinai South Nassau. “Excellent immunity, as measured by decreased hospitalizations and few with serious illness, has been shown to be present in single ‘boosted’ individuals. It is simply not clear if and when a fourth dose will be required.”

Save the Date

Mount Sinai South Nassau’s 38th Annual Golf Outing

WHEN: Monday, May 16
WHERE: The Seawane Club, Hewlett Harbor; Rockaway Hunting Club, Lawrence; and Rockville Links Club, Rockville Centre

TO RESERVE A FOURSOME, call 516-377-5360.