



Montefiore

From the OFFICE OF THE DEAN



Dear Einstein Community:

Earlier this month, Dr. Robert Redfield, director of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said that winter will be “the most difficult time in the public health history of this nation” unless more people follow precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19. He estimated that the American death toll from the virus could rise to 450,000 by February 2021 unless a large percentage of Americans follow safety measures, such as mask wearing.

Dr. Redfield’s warning echoes the concerns voiced in recent weeks by members of our community who have seen others being lax about key safety protocols. Now more than ever, we need everyone on campus to abide by our safety requirements, which are detailed on [our newly updated COVID-19 website](#).

This site continues to serve as a single source of information about our policies, procedures, and protocols. We have just refreshed and expanded the page that now includes our new [Einstein COVID-19 dashboard](#), which provides daily (weekday) updates on the number of cases within our campus community, as well as a comprehensive record of cases from the pandemic’s start until now. The site also has [an infographic](#) explaining Einstein’s contact tracing procedure, and information on how to report a positive or suspected case of COVID-19.

Public Disclosure of COVID-19 Cases on Campus

Many of you have contacted me regarding concerns about the number of cases on campus and how much we can disclose about them. We have been very cautious in our approach in order to safeguard people's privacy. For example, it is possible that even naming the building and floor of a positive case may be enough information for others to identify a person and therefore reveal their protected health information. However, we continue to explore our options of how and what to communicate to the community beyond what is already reported on the daily dashboard.

I want to assure you that whenever a positive case is reported, OHS and human resources follow CDC guidelines to conduct thorough contact tracing. They notify every individual on campus who is deemed a “close contact” and therefore at potential risk for infection. Those who meet the criteria for “close contact” of a confirmed case of COVID-19 are defined as “anyone who was within six feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period, either from two days before illness onset, or, if asymptomatic, in the two days prior to specimen collection that led to a positive test result.” If you are not notified, then you are not considered a “close contact.”

I also want to stress that when a positive case is identified on campus, the area where the exposed person works is thoroughly cleaned and disinfected, again following recommended CDC guidelines. If you have questions about any of this, you should contact Robert Cancellieri at Robert.cancellieri@einsteinmed.org or 718-430-2551.

To Test or Not to Test

The question of whether Einstein will or should offer expanded COVID-19 screening has been a concern for many of you. In recent weeks, I’ve had numerous conversations with my leadership team and we are discussing a range of testing options. While our final decision has yet to be made, we are not inclined at this point to make testing mandatory for a variety of logistical, financial, and practical reasons. Instead, we are exploring the best options to offer testing to anyone on campus who requests it or believes they might have been exposed to the virus. This will not include anyone who is symptomatic or is a confirmed contact, as our primary goal continues to be campus safety and to keep the rate of infection low in order to protect our community and maintain our current level of operations.

We are also exploring the possibility of “random” or “pool” testing of individuals and groups on campus. Our final decision on testing, and whether it will be conducted on campus or off, will be announced before the end of this year or early in 2021.

As has been our usual practice, any Einstein employee or student who is experiencing symptoms or suspects they’ve been exposed to someone infected with the virus [must contact our OHS \(employees\) or SHS \(students\)](#). A staff

member will then assist you in assessing your needs, including immediate referral to testing if that is necessary.

I want to emphasize, however, that known safety measures, particularly mask wearing, social distancing, and regular handwashing—not tests—are the best means to prevent the spread of disease. While testing can provide reassurance, it is only our actions and behavior that truly prevent the spread of the virus.

Availability of Vaccines

Also on everyone's minds has been the issue of when they can receive a vaccine. As many of you know, Montefiore has received some initial doses. The first to receive these will be staff in ICUs, labor/delivery, and emergency departments. Separately, Einstein is exploring the possibility of getting enough doses to give to all our employees and students. Should that happen, we will announce a distribution plan as soon as we possibly can.

Medical Education Concerns

Finally, some medical students have questioned why we are the only medical school in New York City holding in-person activities. As with screening, this decision was not made lightly. Dr. Josh Nosanchuk and the office of medical education are closely monitoring community and health system rates of positive cases and will make further changes, as needed.

For example, when the positivity rate in the community (in the 10461 zip code) and health system hit 5% several days ago, Dr. Nosanchuk and the education faculty and staff transitioned all courses except anatomy and the doctoring course to virtual. For the anatomy and doctoring courses, the plan is to go virtual if we hit a positivity rate of 8% to 10%. With regard to clerkships, students will stay in clinical settings as long as there is appropriate supervision and PPE.

Dean's Chat

In closing, please know that your concerns are ours. I hope you can join my next dean's chat, which takes place tomorrow, [December 18, at 1:30 p.m.](#), and will feature a special panel of infectious diseases experts who will help me address questions and concerns about COVID-19 screening, vaccines, and related issues.

Once again, I want to thank you for your input, as well as your continued cooperation in employing the best practices for COVID-19 prevention. Together,

we *can* fight through our fatigue with this pandemic and maintain the safety for our campus that we've successfully achieved up to now.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Tomaselli', with a stylized, flowing script.

Gordon F. Tomaselli, M.D.

The Marilyn and Stanley M. Katz Dean

Albert Einstein College of Medicine

Executive Vice President and Chief Academic Officer