

## COVID Research Update Email – Week of Jan. 18

Dear Colleagues,

If you're anything like me, most of you have spent a lot of time reading, thinking and talking about the COVID vaccines. Most of you likely also know someone who's gotten at least one dose of the vaccine by now.

Our infectious disease researchers – notably Angela Branche, Ann Falsey and Mike Keefer in the Department of Medicine – continue to serve as national leaders in the ongoing trials of COVID treatments and vaccines, which will soon be expanding to include children (led by Mary Caserta in the Department of Pediatrics).

At the same time, our clinical colleagues have been working extremely hard: to date, they've vaccinated over 15,000 individuals at Strong Memorial Hospital. The vast majority of those vaccinated thus far are health care workers, along with more than 600 researchers at URM with significant work-related exposure to the virus. Immunization of individuals in "Group 1B", including persons who are 65 or older, started last week.

Many of you may have heard stories about vaccine going to waste, or about academic medical centers that have vaccinated workers who don't qualify. Neither of these things has happened here at URM. It makes me feel good to say that – and proud of Mike Apostolakos, our Chief Medical Officer, and his outstanding team.

URM is among the state-wide leaders in getting vaccine out to those who need it, and has developed a robust infrastructure for rapid vaccine distribution. We're fortunate that URM's Nana Bennett is leading the [Monroe County vaccination task force](#), in partnership with URM Community Advisory Council co-chair Wade Norwood, who is directing community engagement and education efforts to ensure equity and fairness in vaccine access.

The pace of vaccine rollout is currently constrained by the number of doses provided to the State and to URM – a variable that is not under our control. However, as the volume of available vaccine ramps up over the next several weeks and months, we can expect the pace of vaccine delivery to accelerate accordingly.

As that happens, the University will continue to follow the (evolving) rules for vaccine distribution that have been established by New York State, and I encourage you to bookmark [URM's Coronavirus Vaccination website](#) for the latest information.

Given the many uncertainties that exist right now, it's not possible to know exactly when each of us will get vaccinated. But, everyone who wants to get vaccinated will get vaccinated. Certainly by the end of the summer, and hopefully sooner.

Until then, I ask for your enduring patience and understanding.

Vaccine-eligible individuals will be contacted directly; we are asking that people do NOT call our vaccination teams for an update; they already have more than enough on their plate.

Note also that masking and social distancing are here to stay for the foreseeable future. Members of our community who become vaccinated will still need to observe all COVID-prevention measures.

Please take time to review some additional updates below. Finally: please continue to look out for each other, and make sure that you take care of yourselves, as well. We are getting closer to the light at the end of tunnel.

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[Steve Dewhurst, PhD](#)

Vice Dean for Research

**Additional Updates:**

COVID-positive members of URMC: As reported in @rochester and other communications, cases of infected URM C faculty, staff members and students have been identified. Due to medical privacy rules, the identity of the affected individuals cannot be made public. However, contact tracing commences immediately as soon as such cases are discovered. If you were in an area of potential exposure you will be notified. If that does not happen, you are not working in an area of recognized infection risk.

New COVID variants: Ann Falsey, co-director of the URM C Vaccine Treatment and Evaluation Unit believes current vaccines will provide protection against the B.117 variant, which emerged in the U.K. Preliminary data on the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine shows vaccinated individuals make antibodies that are effective against B.117 and another variant that has recently emerged in South Africa. Read more about the new variants [here](#).

Vaccination availability for faculty and staff 65 and older, and in-person instructors, faculty: Last week we began offering COVID vaccines to our faculty, staff and matriculated students 65 years of age and over. At this time, all appointment times are full. When additional vaccine becomes available, we will open up additional slots for these groups, as well as those in-person college faculty and instructors who meet the eligibility requirements outlined by New York State. Please bring your University ID, driver's license and insurance card to your appointment. [Visit our Vaccine website for more information](#).

If you have any concerns about safety compliance or other issues related to work, please email [research\\_covid\\_concerns@urmc.rochester.edu](mailto:research_covid_concerns@urmc.rochester.edu).