

COVID-19 Update

April 8: NM Vaccination Update, CDC Travel Guidelines for Fully Vaccinated Individuals, and an Infectious Disease Specialist Reflects on a Year That Changed the World

Today's issue includes an update on NM vaccinations, as well as information about the recently released Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines for fully vaccinated individuals. It also features the personal perspective of a Northwestern Medicine infectious disease physician on how the past year has impacted him and the field of medicine.

NM VACCINATION STATUS UPDATE

A total of 69,387 patients and employees have been fully vaccinated by NM. In addition, vaccination invitations have been sent to all established patients 65 and older, as well as established patients 18 and older who have at least one high-risk medical condition as defined by the Illinois Department of Public Health. Currently, NM is administering almost 10,000 first doses a week across the health system.

As a reminder, the following documents are now available to assist patients in accessing proof of COVID-19 vaccination and to address workforce vaccination status:

- **COVID-19 Immunization Summary report** is available under the Misc tab in the Epic Chart Review. It can be printed from this tab and provided to patients as proof of vaccination.
- **MyNM Instructions for Finding COVID-19 Immunization** is a printable tip sheet that provides patients instructions for accessing vaccination documentation in MyNM.
- **How to Reconcile External COVID-19 Immunizations** provides physicians and clinicians with tips for documenting proof of COVID-19 vaccination for patients who have received the immunization outside of NM.
- **Workforce Vaccination Status** provides talking points to address patient questions about the vaccination status of NM physicians and staff.

For additional information and tip sheets regarding patient vaccination, please visit the “Tip Sheets for Patients” and “Tip Sheets and Protocols for Physicians and Staff” sections in the **Patient Vaccine Toolkit** on Physician Focus and **NMI** (login required).

CDC GUIDELINES FOR FULLY VACCINATED INDIVIDUALS

According to new **guidelines** released on April 2 by the CDC, people who are fully vaccinated with an **FDA-authorized vaccine** can travel safely within the United States. Being fully vaccinated is defined as having at least two weeks pass since receipt of the second shot for two-dose vaccines, or having two weeks pass since receipt of a single-dose vaccine. Travel for those who are not fully

vaccinated and [international travel](#) for anyone in the U.S. are not recommended. If you are fully vaccinated and choose to travel, the CDC recommends the following steps to protect others:

During travel

- Wear a mask over your nose and mouth. Masks are required on planes, buses, trains and other forms of public transportation traveling into, within or out of the U.S., and in U.S. transportation hubs such as airports and transportation stations.
- Avoid crowds and, when possible, stay at least 6 feet from anyone who is not traveling with you.
- Wash your hands often or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

After travel

- If you are fully vaccinated, you do not need to get tested or self-quarantine unless you develop symptoms.
- If you develop symptoms suggestive of COVID-19, isolate and get tested.
- Follow all state and local recommendations or requirements.

NM physicians and employees are strongly encouraged to postpone domestic personal travel, in particular to states identified as orange on the [City of Chicago Emergency Travel Order](#). At present, NM is not approving business related travel; however, we are reviewing the guidelines on a regular basis. State, local and territorial governments also may have travel restrictions in place, including testing requirements, stay-at-home orders and quarantine requirements upon arrival. For up-to-date information and travel guidance, check the [state or territorial and local health department](#) where you are, along your route and where you are going.

For additional information, please visit the [Domestic Travel During COVID-19 page](#) on the CDC website. For information about NM travel guidelines during COVID-19, please view the Travel section of the [FAQs for NM Workforce](#) document on Physician Forum and the [Travel FAQs page](#) on NMI (login required).

AN INFECTIOUS DISEASE SPECIALIST REFLECTS ON A YEAR THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

As we pass the one-year mark of the COVID-19 pandemic, NM physicians continue to share their perspectives. Here, [Irfan Hafiz, MD](#), infectious disease specialist and chief medical officer of the Northwest Region, reflects on how events of the past year have impacted him, NM and the world.

Think back to the moment when you realized that you were treating your first patient with COVID-19. What was that moment like for you, both as a physician and as a human being?

Early on when we first encountered patients that may have had COVID-19, there was a noticeable sense of anxiety among the staff. Understandably, there was a lot of fear of the unknown. For me as an ID doc, there were a lot of emotions. On the one hand, the rational side of me was trying to understand the risks of exposure based on what little we knew of SARS-CoV-2 at the time and filling in the blanks with what we knew of coronaviruses. This was balanced by some of the reports of the devastation that we knew had affected Wuhan, Italy, Portland and New York City. Were we going to experience something like that? Were we next? If so, when? We just did not know. Out of fear of the unknown, we had staff taking extra steps that only added to the anxiety of others. It was a challenging time to keep our minds focused on the problem, to keep morale up and to keep fear from taking over.

For you as a physician, what do you think has been the most significant change that will last beyond the healthcare crisis?

The most significant change for health care may be how we approach pandemics. This is certainly something most healthcare professionals have never encountered in their careers. The need to have PPE, testing supplies, the ability to flex staff to meet the demands are so important, as well as how we partner with local county and state health officials.

Thinking back over the past year, what are some of the moments that stand out as pivotal and of which you are most proud?

A few things come to mind:

- Our ability to shift resources across the system and to get teams together to talk about best practice when none existed at the time was pivotal.
- Our ability to get testing started was significant. At first, it was very slow, but then as it got better, NM was able to scale up availability quickly and push it out to the regional hospitals. This allowed for better triage of patients and increased staff safety, and later allowed for safe reactivation.
- Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) of remdesivir was also an important moment. Though not a cure, it was the first drug to provide some promise and hope that we can treat patients. Prior to that, it was emotionally troublesome to have patients come in with severe disease but with little to offer that had any advantage other than supportive care.
- The early results from the Pfizer vaccine trial was the first time I really felt that we had a chance to control the further destruction of the disease, a chance to finally prevent the disease beyond universal masking. For me, getting my first dose of the vaccine was an emotional moment. It offered a glimmer of hope that this pandemic will end.

Overall, how do you think this pandemic has impacted and shaped you as a physician, and shaped Northwestern Medicine as a health system?

As a physician, the pandemic has certainly given me hope that we can solve real problems, that we live in amazing times where we can go from an unknown virus to a reliable vaccine in under a year. We could not have done that without the great scientists, doctors and nurses around the world who all helped.

As an individual, it has humbled me to see so much suffering and despair over the past year. I have taken care of too many patients who are not here today. I have seen whole families lose several members to the pandemic. Looking back, I am even more grateful for what I have and the privilege to take care of so many people, and I hope that I have helped some of them get better. I am proud to be part of NM and the diverse talent across the system, all doing their part to make the system work as a whole.

*More moments from the past year that are important to remember, as well as those that will never be forgotten, can be viewed in a new infographic called **A Year That Changed the World** now on HealthBeat at nm.org/healthbeat.*

As we continue to accelerate our vaccination efforts, please remind your patients and colleagues that compliance with public health guidelines remains necessary. Thank you to all of the physicians and providers across NM for your continued commitment to our *Patients First* mission.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gary A. Noskin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Gary" and last name "Noskin" clearly legible.

Gary A. Noskin, MD
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