

# COVID-19 Update

## November 17: Testing Updates, Flu Vaccine Equity, and U.S. News Healthcare of Tomorrow Webinar

*Today's issue features an update on testing turnaround times, as well as information to assist physicians and providers in achieving flu vaccination equity in communities that have been hit hardest by the pandemic. It also includes details about the upcoming U.S. News & World Report "Healthcare of Tomorrow" webinar, which will feature NM Pulmonologist and Critical Care Specialist Elizabeth Malsin, MD.*

### TESTING UPDATES

Due to a surge in COVID-19 cases across Chicago, the viral testing volume at NM has increased by 13%. Daily collections average more than 5,000 specimens per day, which exceeds our internal capacity, forcing outpatient (non-pre-procedure) tests to be sent to Quest Diagnostics for processing. Quest has given NM priority one status for processing; however, their turnaround times are typically two to three days longer. The lab is actively working to increase internal testing by expanding capacity on current PCR testing platforms and validating new technologies.

We are closely monitoring several key factors:

- **Flu season:** As we enter flu season, symptomatic patients will be recommended to receive flu A/B and COVID-19 testing. Several vendors are producing multiplex tests. Additionally, some are discontinuing SARS-CoV-2-only tests, which may result in patients receiving a multiplex even in the setting of needing only a SARS-CoV-2 result. Comprehensive testing and treatment recommendations can be found at this [link](#).
- **Antigen testing:** Platforms are just coming onto the market, and we are in the process of validating multiple options. As we complete validations, we will update the clinical guidelines and order panels. The first platform should become available within the next several weeks.
- **Turnaround time dashboard:** Recently, the NM Lab experienced an unexpected IS downtime while also facing a surge in testing demands. This led to a testing backlog and extended turnaround times. To increase transparency, a lab COVID-19 testing turnaround time dashboard is being developed and will be available through the COVID-19 page on NM Interactive next week.

For additional information, please visit the [Testing Resources page on Physician Forum](#) or the [Testing Resources page on NMI](#) (login required).

### FLU VACCINATION DISPARITY AND EQUITY

With influenza season upon us, many physicians have expressed concern about the possibility that vulnerable patients may contract both COVID-19 and influenza, with potentially serious health consequences. To assist you and your practices in ensuring more patients receive the flu vaccine this year, Northwestern Medicine has updated and developed a series of NM flu vaccination tools, including clinic and hospital signage, patient messaging through MyNM, mail and email templates, patient information on the [Flu \(Influenza\) page](#) on nm.org, and social media campaigns.

Another concern this flu season is the disparity in the proportion of Black and Latinx patients who accept the vaccine. This disparity is documented in the literature, including research from the [CDC](#) and three studies (see below) led in part by [Kenzie Cameron, PhD, MPH](#), research professor of Medicine (General Internal Medicine and Geriatrics), Medical Education, Medical Social Sciences and Preventive Medicine, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. Across NM, we have observed a sizable gap in flu vaccine acceptance among members of Black and Latinx communities. The gap between white and Black patients ranges from 6 to 15 percentage points, and the gap between non-Latinx and Latinx patients is between 3 and 7 percentage points.

Black and Latinx communities have been hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the disparity in influenza vaccination rates may place them at even greater risk for contracting dual infections with influenza and COVID-19. Our equity goal at NM is to reduce and close the gap in vaccination rates. To help you achieve flu equity, a team of NM and Northwestern University staff has developed resources that are tailored specifically to address vaccine hesitancy among Black and Latinx patients.

Flu equity resources available to you and your practices include:

- [Tips for Working With Vaccine-Hesitant Patients \(video\)](#) – a five-minute video featuring NM physicians Muriel Jean-Jacques, MD, and Jose Magana, MD, as well as several medical assistants, describing their personal techniques and best practices to address vaccine hesitancy in patients
- [How to Engage With Vaccine-Hesitant Patients \(the “myth, fact, why” framework\)](#) – a concise guide that offers tips and advice for communicating with and encouraging patients to get vaccinated
- [NM Flu Resources \(signage\)](#) – updated with tested messaging to reflect diverse communities and Spanish language options
- [Flu \(Influenza\) patient education page](#) – a variety of patient resources available on nm.org, in both English and Spanish

As healthcare professionals, we have a unique opportunity to make a difference in vital health outcomes for our communities by encouraging patients who may be most at risk, as well all patients, to receive the flu vaccination this year. These tools will assist you in having conversations with patients and addressing myths about the flu vaccine. Use the “myth, fact, why” framework to help you build trust and reach patients effectively.

For additional information about influenza vaccination disparity, please view the following research from Dr. Cameron:

***U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT ‘HEALTHCARE OF TOMORROW’ WEBINAR***

NM Pulmonologist and Critical Care Specialist **Elizabeth Malsin, MD**, will be the keynote speaker for the *U.S. News & World Report* virtual webinar series “Healthcare of Tomorrow.” At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Malsin dedicated her time to caring for patients in the NMH COVID-19 ICU. She was part of the large team that cared for Mayra Ramirez, the first patient to undergo a double-lung transplant after surviving COVID-19, who will also join the conversation.

**Healthcare of Tomorrow**  
**Friday, November 20, 1 pm**  
[Register for the webinar](#)

**Conversation: Back From the Brink**

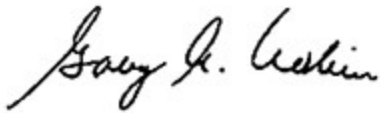
*Featuring: Elizabeth Malsin, MD, and Mayra Ramirez, Dr. Malsin's patient and first-known patient in the U.S. to receive a double-lung transplant stemming from COVID-19 infection*

**Panel: Lessons From the COVID-19 Front Lines: Clinician Perspectives**

*Featuring: Esther Choo, MD, MPH, professor, Center for Policy and Research in Emergency Medicine, Oregon Health & Science University; Elizabeth Malsin, MD, pulmonary and critical care specialist, Northwestern Memorial Hospital; Vin Gupta, MD, pulmonary and critical care physician and affiliate assistant professor of Health Metrics Sciences, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington; Jessica Montanaro, RN, assistant nursing care coordinator, Medical-Surgical Trauma ICU, Mount Sinai Morningside Hospital*

---

Thank you to all NM physicians and clinicians for your collaboration and leadership as we continue to navigate the pandemic. Your continued commitment to providing safe, high-quality, *Patients First* care is deeply appreciated.



**Gary A. Noskin, MD**  
Senior Vice President, Quality  
Northwestern Memorial HealthCare  
Chief Medical Officer  
Northwestern Memorial Hospital