

January 12, 2022



Hi Team –

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in our community two years ago, TriHealth has been preparing for the possibility of a surge of new COVID cases and hospitalizations so large that it could potentially overwhelm our hospitals. Fueled by the far more transmissible Omicron variant raging across the region, this possibility is becoming our reality.

That is why yesterday we convened our team members, physicians and leaders for a series of special COVID town hall discussions to inform every team member and physician across our entire health system of all that TriHealth is doing to manage through this latest – and hopefully final – pandemic wave. It is also why the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners declared a state of emergency yesterday due to rising COVID-19 cases in our region. For those unable to participate in the Town Hall discussion, [click this link](#) to view a recording of the Team Member Town Hall.

### Rising COVID Cases and Forecasting

Nationally and locally, all data indicates the continued sharp rise in new COVID cases and hospitalizations. This week, as a result of the unprecedented rapid spread of the Omicron variant, Ohio eclipsed the highest number of COVID inpatients across the state, exceeding the previous high from the peak of the third wave last January. And here at TriHealth, as indicated in the sidebar to the right, our COVID admissions are at an all-time high. In fact, in the past month, we have more than doubled our COVID inpatient census from 111 patients to more than 228 today.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) projects that new COVID infections and associated hospitalizations will continue to rise on this near-vertical trajectory for the next three to four weeks. Local modeling suggests our region could exceed 1,200 COVID inpatients in the next few weeks up from roughly 900 currently, resulting in an additional 75-125 COVID patients at TriHealth hospitals. Based on these projections, it is likely that we are now facing the overwhelming surge that we've been preparing for but had not come during previous waves. And though the sheer magnitude of this surge is unlike previous challenges we've faced throughout this pandemic, we can take the learnings from other communities – from South Africa to England to the Cleveland area – who have preceded Cincinnati in this Omicron-fueled surge. These cities and countries experienced a short, intense surge that arrives and resolves relatively quickly over the course of a few weeks, and we are optimistic that we will follow suit here.

### We Are Ready

The surge in hospitalizations we've predicted and planned for over the past two years is now here. And TriHealth - with the amazing support of our leaders, team members and physicians - is ready!

From the onset of this public health crisis, TriHealth has stayed true to our operating philosophy of preparing for the worst and working TOGETHER to achieve the best possible outcome. And once again – as we have done countless times over the past two years – each and every team member, physician and leader will be called upon

### COVID-19 Weekly Update

- 228 COVID-positive patients in TriHealth hospitals with 24 on ventilators in the ICU.
- 33% COVID positivity rate in the region, with a 45.9% positivity rate for symptomatic patients tested at TriHealth over past two weeks. Target positivity rate is under 5%!
- R-factor for 14-county region now at 1.18. Hamilton County R-factor now at 1.11. Target R-factor is below 1.0.

to come together to help execute our plan to ensure that every patient in need – COVID and non-COVID alike – is cared for in their time of greatest need.

Our plans to increase our physical bed count in our hospitals are now in action. Thanks to an enormous team effort from our hospital and operations leaders, we have identified physical space on each hospital campus to add more beds to meet this increasing demand. Through a phased approach in the coming days and weeks, which includes repurposing ambulatory recovery and holding areas in our hospitals and converting suitable private rooms to semi-private rooms, we have the ability to add as many as 150+ new beds across our system.

Our greatest challenge today in providing care to as many as 150 additional COVID patients is less about physical beds and more about having appropriate, experienced staff including nurses, allied health professionals, support team members and providers at the bedside. The tight labor market brought on by COVID, a healthcare workforce already stretched thin, and the now growing number of team members off work due to the more contagious Omicron variant have made staffing these new beds that much more challenging. However, we have overcome these challenges through innovative programs and initiatives ranging from our Helping Hands program, to new incentives rewarding team members for stepping up to take additional shifts, to bold strategies to retain and attract new talent, to expanding the use of temporary agency support and much more. And we are also limiting elective surgeries and procedures that require hospital admissions allowing us to shift caregivers from less-busy procedural areas to our hospital floors, Emergency Departments and ICUs. All of these steps and others have enabled us to build the staffing plans and work schedules needed to safely care for the additional patients likely to require inpatient care as a result of this surge.

#### **Coming Together – One Team, TriHealth Strong**

Without a doubt, we will all be stretched and taxed in the coming weeks, but we expect this surge to peak and then level and begin to decline relatively quickly, as has been the pattern in other countries and regions. By relying on our shared experiences and learnings over the past two years, we have more than readied ourselves to take on this latest and hopefully final challenge of this two-year pandemic.

We are prepared. We are ready. We have the right plans and the right people to accomplish the work ahead. And perhaps most importantly, we have the right patient-centered “can do” culture to help us manage through these next few weeks. At every turn of this truly unpredictable COVID journey – in the face of the seemingly unending challenges and countless sacrifices – we have come together like never before to deliver on our promise to always be there for our patients at their time of greatest need. And I am confident that we will once again rise to this challenge before us – One Team, TriHealth Strong – always putting our patients first, never turning a patient away, and leading our region through this once-in-a-lifetime crisis. Thank you for all you have done and will do in the coming weeks.