

Updates From the Medical Director/CEO
Updated 03/01/21

Dear Members of the Austen Riggs Community:

In keeping with my promise to reach out when we have significant changes related to the COVID-19 status at Austen Riggs, I am pleased to provide you with an update that reflects several favorable trends.

First, since my last message on January 29, our COVID-19 testing program has returned no positive results for Riggs patients or staff. At present, no one at Riggs is under our isolation protocols. We have an overall positive test rate of approximately 0.1% after over 4,600 tests.

Second, over 90% of our patients and staff have had both doses of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.

These factors, in conjunction with a significant drop in the incidence of COVID-19 in the local area, mean we are able to relax several restrictions on local activities, visiting, and travel, as follows:

Travel: The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) continues to advise everyone to avoid travel because it is not known whether those who are vaccinated might spread COVID-19. However, the CDC and the state of Massachusetts do allow for *necessary* travel. We recognize that for many patients this may include visiting loved ones or having them visit. In such cases, we ask anyone who has been vaccinated and who is coming from (or returning from) out of state follow the MA travel [orders](#), which require quarantine until a negative test result. The test can be taken in the state from which you are coming up to 72 hours before entering Massachusetts, or after entering Massachusetts. Unvaccinated patients and staff will need to follow the more conservative current practice of testing 72 hours after entering Massachusetts and remaining in quarantine until receiving a negative result.

Visits to campus will be conducted outdoors only. Nursing staff must be notified in advance and will screen for COVID-19 upon arrival. No visitors with any symptoms or recent exposure to COVID-19 will be allowed to come to Riggs. We are also requiring standard preventive measures, including use of masks in public areas on or off campus, indoors or out, along with maintaining a minimum 6 feet of distance from others and frequent hand washing.

Testing: In response to the lower risk on campus, we are shifting most vaccinated patients and staff to weekly group testing from the previous practice of individual tests twice a week. In the event that one of the groups has a positive test result, we will immediately conduct individual tests for everyone in that group. Those people will need to quarantine while awaiting results. Unvaccinated patients and staff will continue to undergo individual testing twice each week.

These are important steps forward for Riggs, the state, and the nation. However, we have a long way to go before emerging from the pandemic. As more people receive the vaccine, we expect there will be additional changes to national and state guidelines. We are constantly monitoring the evolving guidance, and when we make further significant alterations to our protocols, I will provide an update.

With best wishes,

Eric M. Plakun, MD
Medical Director/CEO