

MTA Safety Officer Patrick Warren to the MTA Board

The Health Community and the MTA are both concerned and preparing to protect our employees and customers from a predicted second wave of COVID-19 as the cold weather approaches in the NY Metropolitan Area.

To this end we are focused on four lines of effort:

First, we are in the throes of rolling out a flu shot immunization campaign to strengthen our employee's ability to fight this illnesses that has symptoms that resemble COVID-19 and would otherwise weaken their immune system. This program includes making it easier for our employees to receive their shots -- by delivering immunizations to our employees at our medical facilities, at yards and depots and select offices. We are further partnering with pharmacies [Walgreens?] and other healthcare providers to provide flu shots at no cost to our employees. We will also utilize a robust communications campaign to highlight the importance of getting a flu shot this year in light of the dual threat of flue and COVID-19 – what some health professionals are labeling a “twin-demic”. We will have more on this next week.

Our second line of effort to deter Wave 2 of the COVID-19 pandemic is that we are pursuing cutting edge rapid diagnostic testing protocols to provide more effective, early screening of employees and contractors that live outside the NYC metropolitan area before they encounter our workforce and customers. We are also seeking new, inexpensive rapid testing protocols that could further help identify individuals that have contracted the virus but are asymptomatic in order to limit their ability to expose others to the virus.

Third, we are carefully monitoring our employees that test positive for the virus and have developed decision matrixes that allow us to rapidly ramp up our COVID-19 support efforts – such as increasing the number of individuals working in our “call centers” in order to better manage contract tracing, information dissemination, and other health and safety support.

And fourth, agencies have developed decision tools which provide the ability to adjust their service levels based on employee availability due to COVID-19 infection and/or Close-Contact quarantines.

I will also note we continue to focus on air quality and improved ventilation both on our system and across our occupational facilities. We have performed an enclosed area risk assessment (assessing size, temperature and ventilation system design/ airflow rate) and HVAC assessments have already been performed at most facilities and key locations have been upgraded or otherwise improved. Additionally, the rate of fresh air exchange on subways ranges between 18 and 25 times per hour, which exceeds the minimum rates of air exchanges per hour cited by the CDC for certain for certain health care facilities. Our work exploring different types of innovative air filters and other technologies to prevent the spread of COVID-19 across the system continues.