Vatican
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pope's doctors at press conference

Dr. Luigi Carbone, the pope's personal physician, left, and Dr. Sergio Alfieri, who has led the medical team treating the pope in the hospital, right, prepare to speak at a news conference at Rome's Gemelli Hospital March 22. The pope's doctors announced that he would be discharged from the hospital and return to his residence in the Vatican on Sunday. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)

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***Editor's note**: This story has been updated with additional information from the press conference.*

Pope Francis will be released from the hospital on Sunday (March 23) after 38 days battling a severe case of pneumonia in both lungs that threatened his life on two occasions when he suffered acute respiratory crises, his doctors said Saturday.

Dr. Sergio Alfieri, who coordinated Francis' medical team at Rome's Gemelli Hospital, said March 22 that Francis will require at least two months of rest and rehabilitation as he continues recovering at the Vatican. But his personal doctor, Dr. Luigi Carbone, said if he continues his steady improvements to date, he should be able to resume his normal activity.

The doctors spoke at a hastily-called press conference Saturday evening in the Gemelli hospital atrium, their first in-person update on the pontiff’s condition in a month.

They provided details on the severity of the infection, which he is still being treated for, and the two respiratory crises that marked the gravest threats to his life. They confirmed he would be released Sunday, after first offering a blessing to the faithful from his hospital suite, the first time he will have been seen by the public since he was admitted Feb. 14.

"When he was in really bad shape, it was difficult that he was in good spirits," Alfieri said. "But one morning we went to listen to his lungs and we asked him how he was doing. When he replied, 'I'm still alive' we knew he was OK and had gotten his good humor back."

> 'The Holy Father is improving, and we hope soon he can resume his normal activity.'
> —Dr. Luigi Carbone

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Dr. Sergio Alfieri said Saturday (March 22) that Francis will require at least two months of rest and rehabilitation as he continues recovering at the Vatican.

The 88-year-old Argentine pope, who has chronic lung disease and had part of one lung removed as a young man, was admitted to the hospital on Feb. 14 after a bout of bronchitis worsened.

Doctors first diagnosed a complex bacterial, viral and fungal respiratory tract infection and soon thereafter, pneumonia in both lungs. Blood tests showed signs of anemia, low blood platelets and the onset of kidney failure, all of which later resolved after two blood transfusions.

The most serious setbacks began on Feb. 28, when Francis experienced an acute coughing fit and inhaled vomit, requiring he use a noninvasive mechanical ventilation mask to help him breathe. He suffered two more respiratory crises on

March 3, which required doctors manually aspirate the mucus, at which point he began sleeping with the ventilation mask at night to help his lungs clear the accumulation of fluids.

At no point did he lose consciousness, doctors said, adding that he always remained alert and cooperative.

Pope Francis is seen in the chapel of his suite of rooms at Rome's Gemelli hospital March 16,

In the first photo of Pope Francis since he entered hospital 31 days ago, the pontiff is seen in the chapel of his suite of rooms at Rome's Gemelli hospital March 16, 2025. The Vatican press office said the 88-year-old pope concelebrated Mass. (CNS/Vatican Press Office.)

Alfieri confirmed that Francis was still having trouble speaking due to the damage to his lungs and the time he spent on supplemental oxygen and ventilation. But he said such problems were normal and predicted his voice would return.

"When you have a bilateral pneumonia, your lungs get damaged and the respiratory muscles are in difficulty. You lose your voice a bit, like when you speak too high," Alfieri said. "As for all patients, young or old but especially older ones, you need time for it to come back as it was."

Over the past two weeks, Francis' condition has stabilized and registered slight improvements. He no longer needs to wear the ventilation mask at night, and is cutting back his reliance on high flows of supplemental oxygen during the day.

At his home in Casa Santa Marta, next to St Peter’s Basilica, Francis will have access to supplemental oxygen and 24-hour medical care as needed, Carbone said.

"The Holy Father is improving, and we hope soon he can resume his normal activity," Carbone said.

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While the pneumonia infection has been successfully treated, Francis will continue to take oral medication for several months to treat the fungal infection in his lungs.

Alfieri said it was actually safer for him to continue his recovery and rehabilitation at the Vatican since hospitals “are the worst place to convalesce because it's the place where you can catch the most infections.”

The Vatican spokesman, Matteo Bruni, declined to confirm any upcoming events, including a scheduled audience April 8 with King Charles III or Francis' participation in Easter services at the end of the month. But Carbone said he hoped Francis might be well enough to travel to Turkey at the end of May to participate in an important ecumenical anniversary.

The Vatican announced that before returning to the Vatican, Francis would appear on Sunday morning to bless the faithful from his 10th floor suite at the hospital. While Francis released an audio message on March 6 and the Vatican distributed a photo of him March 16, Sunday’s blessing will be the first live appearance since Francis was admitted for what has become the longest hospitalization of his 12-year papacy.

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