

MEDIA RELEASE

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Contact: Kristin Prelipp, Communications Manager and Public Information Officer
kprelipp@orangecountync.gov or 919-245-2462

LINK TO MEDIA RELEASE

Orange County Plans for Phased, Equitable Distribution of COVID-19 Vaccine

HILLSBOROUGH, N.C. December 11, 2020 — When a COVID vaccine is available for the general public, the Orange County Health Department has a plan to ensure the vaccine is distributed equitably and efficiently to county residents.

To help determine who should get the vaccine first, the North Carolina Institute of Medicine convened an independent COVID Vaccine Advisory Committee. The prioritization plan is based on the committee's guidance along with guidance from the National Academy of Medicine on equitable distribution of vaccine.

Initial phases will concentrate on the most vulnerable populations, including long-term care facilities, first responders, healthcare workers and others involved in treating COVID patients or administering the vaccine. Vaccines could be approved and administered as early as mid-December for the initial phase.

"A tested, safe and effective vaccine will be available to all who want it, but supplies will be limited at first," said Orange County Health Director Quintana Stewart. "Although the vaccines were developed quickly, they were built upon years of work in developing vaccines for similar viruses."

Independent state and federal public health advisory committees have determined that the best way to fight COVID-19 is to start with vaccinations for those most at risk, reaching more people as the vaccine supply increases from January to June.

"Public health and our economy are inseparable," said Renee Price, chair of the Board of County Commissioners. "When all of us come together to take the vaccine, we can end this pandemic, and this will lead to a faster economic recovery."

Successful Testing

More than 70,000 people participated in clinical trials for two vaccines to determine if they are safe and effective. To date, the vaccines are nearly 95% effective in preventing COVID-19 with no safety concerns. COVID-19 vaccines must go through and pass clinical trials like other drugs and vaccines.

Priority List Based on Risk

Those who need the vaccine most will get it first. A tested, safe and effective vaccine will be available free to all who want it, but supplies will be limited. The best way to end the pandemic is to vaccinate those most at risk, then reach more people as the vaccine supply increases throughout 2021. The vaccine requires two doses a few weeks apart.

The vaccine will be distributed in four phases. They are as follows:

Phase 1a: Every health care worker at high risk for exposure to COVID-19. This includes doctors, nurses, and all who interact and care for patients with COVID-19, including those who clean areas used by patients, and those giving vaccines to these workers. The first phase also include long-term care staff and residents as well as people in skilled nursing facilities and in adult, family and group homes.

Phase 1b: This phase includes adults with two or more chronic conditions that put them at risk of severe illness as defined by the CDC, including conditions like cancer, COPD, serious heart conditions, sickle cell disease and Type 2 diabetes, among others. This phase will also include adults at high risk of exposure including essential frontline workers (police, food processing, teachers), health care workers, and those living in prisons, homeless shelters, migrant and fishery housing who have two or more chronic conditions. Those working in prisons, jails and homeless shelters, regardless of chronic conditions, will also be vaccinated in Phase 1b.

Phase 2: Phase 2 will focus on adults at high risk for exposure and at increased risk of severe illness. This includes essential frontline workers, health care workers, and those living in prisons, homeless shelters or migrant and fishery housing. Adults 65 and older will be vaccinated in Phase 2 as well as adults under 65 with one chronic condition that puts them at risk of severe illness as defined by the CDC.

Phase 3: Students and critical industry workers will be vaccinated in the third phase. This includes college and university students, K-12 students when there is an approved vaccine for children and those that are employed in jobs that are critical to society but are at a lower risk of exposure.

Phase 4: Everyone who wants a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccination will be eligible in the final phase.

Read more about the phases from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services: <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/vaccines>

No Major Side Effects

Similar to the flu vaccine, some people may have temporary reactions after being vaccinated, such as swelling from the injection, tiredness or feeling off for a day or two. This feeling is actually a good sign as it means that your body is mounting an effective immune response to COVID-19. The vaccine imitates the infection so that our bodies think a germ like the virus is

attacking. This creates the antibody defenses we need to fight off COVID-19 if and when the real germ attacks. All patients will be given patient education materials at the time of their vaccination.

Guiding Principles of the Vaccination Plan

North Carolina's COVID-19 Vaccination Plan builds on the foundation of the state's overall goals and pillars of response to the pandemic: prevention, testing, tracing, isolation and quarantine. North Carolina took early and aggressive action to slow the spread of the virus, built statewide capacity for testing, PPE supplies and contract tracing, developed hospital surge plans, and promoted aggressive prevention strategies. The guiding principles of the vaccination plan include:

- All North Carolinians have equitable access to vaccines
- Vaccine planning and distribution is inclusive; actively engages state and local government, public and private partners; and draws upon the experience and expertise of leaders from historically marginalized populations.
- Transparent, accurate, and frequent public communications is essential to building trust.
- Data is used to promote equity, track progress, and guide decision-making.
- Appropriate stewardship of resources and continuous evaluation and improvement drive successful implementation.
- No dose is wasted

UNC Health has partnered with local organizations and the Orange County Health Department to ensure that the vaccine is distributed widely and appropriately in Orange County. More specific information about how the vaccines will be distributed will be provided as details become available.

Links to More Information About the Vaccination Plan

VIDEO: Public Health Chat About the Vaccination Plan with Orange County Health Director Quintana Stewart: <https://youtu.be/nhcs80lbqms>

COVID-19 Vaccination 101 from NCDHHS: <https://files.nc.gov/covid/documents/COVID19-Vaccine-101-Deck-Final.pdf>

Vaccine Timeline from NCDHHS: <https://files.nc.gov/covid/documents/Vaccine-Timeline.pdf>

COVID-19 Vaccine Information from NCDHHS: <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/vaccines>

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