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About the COVID-19 vaccine

Background
COVID-19 is a serious virus that continues to affect Pennsylvanians and millions of individuals in the United States and across the world. As the pandemic persists, we have been taking measures to help stop the spread by washing our hands, wearing a mask, practicing social distancing and using tools like the COVID Alert PA app.

Public health officials and medical professionals have determined a need for a vaccine in order to help slow the spread of COVID-19. Vaccine trials are currently underway, and it is anticipated that a vaccine will be available soon. Once vaccine is available, it will be distributed in a phased approach, with those who need it most getting it first.

Key messages
On vaccine effectiveness and safety

• Vaccines are safe and effective—they are the best way to protect you and everyone around you against a number of serious illnesses.
• Stopping a pandemic requires using all the tools available, and vaccines work with your immune system so your body will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed.
• Based on what we know about vaccines for other diseases, getting a COVID-19 vaccine may help keep you from getting seriously sick even if you do get COVID-19.
• COVID-19 vaccines are being carefully evaluated in clinical trials and will be authorized or approved only if they make it substantially less likely you will get COVID-19.
  o They will go through a rigorous approval process before being distributed.
  o While these vaccines are being developed as quickly as possible, routine processes and procedures remain in place to ensure the safety of any vaccine that is authorized or approved for use.
• The Department of Health will work to identify and report any Adverse Drug Reactions (ADV) to the CDC and FDA. COVID-19 Vaccine consumers will receive sheets with instructions on how to report ADRs.
• It is important to remember that when available, the COVID-19 vaccine will not be the “cure” for the virus. It is simply another tool in our toolbelt, and we must
continue to practice other mitigation efforts, like hand washing, social distancing, wearing a mask and downloading COVID Alert PA.

On vaccine distribution
When available, the COVID-19 vaccine will be distributed in a phased approach due to the limited number of doses in the beginning.

Phase 1a: There will be a potentially limited supply of COVID-19 vaccine doses available first. Initial efforts will focus on reaching the following critical populations:
  • Healthcare personnel caring for the sickest COVID patients;
  • Emergency Medical Services first responders;
  • Residents and staff of Long-Term Care, Skilled Nursing, and Personal Care

Phase 1b: Once more vaccine becomes available, it will expand to:
  • Additional healthcare personnel with patient care responsibilities;
  • First responders, law enforcement, fire/rescue personnel;
  • Critical workers who can not work remotely or maintain social distancing;
  • Individuals with high risk conditions;
  • And critical workers.

Phase 2: A larger number of vaccine doses should be available, and supply will likely meet the demand. Efforts will focus on:
  • Those involved in broader healthcare administration;
  • Critical workers not vaccinated in phase 1;
  • Individuals with expanded health conditions not vaccinated in phase 1;
  • Those contributing to the maintenance of core societal functions; and
  • Those at elevated risk due to working or living conditions.

Phase 3: Efforts in this phase will focus on the populations who were no identified in Phase 1 and 2.
BACKGROUND

Getting Pennsylvanians immunized with a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine is an essential step in reducing the number of virus-related cases, hospitalizations and deaths. The Department of Health’s goal is to have enough COVID-19 vaccine for all residents in Pennsylvania who wish to be vaccinated. The department will use a three-phased approach to distribute the vaccine when it becomes available due to limited supply.

DO I HAVE TO GET THE VACCINE?

No, the COVID-19 vaccine will not be mandatory. However, stopping a pandemic requires using all the tools available. Vaccines work with your immune system so your body will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed. Other steps, like wearing a mask, social distancing, washing your hands and downloading COVID Alert PA will help reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus or spreading it to others. Together, COVID-19 vaccination and following CDC’s recommendations to protect yourself and others will offer the best protection from COVID-19.

WHO WILL GET THE VACCINE FIRST WHEN IT’S AVAILABLE?

The department will work to get the vaccine out to Pennsylvanians in three phases, following the CDC guidelines regarding supply, demand and risk of the vaccine. Phase 1 will be divided due to the limited number of vaccine.

Phase 1a: There may be limited supply of COVID-19 vaccine doses available in the first phase. Initial efforts will focus on reaching priority populations of health care workers. The department will also work with the Pharmacy Partnership of CVS and Walgreens to vaccinate residents and staff in skilled nursing and assisted living facilities and personal care homes.

Phase 1b: This phase will focus on first responders and critical workers, and also utilize partnerships with pharmacies and Federally Qualified Health Centers to reach rural settings.

Phase 2: We anticipate an increased number of vaccine doses available. We will work with emergency management agencies located in each county to coordinate community-based vaccination in those counties.

Phase 3: In this phase, there should be a sufficient supply of vaccine doses for entire population. Efforts will focus on ensuring the entire population will have access to the vaccine.

A full list of those included in each phase can be found in the department’s COVID-19 vaccine plan.

IS IT SAFE?

Vaccines will play an important role in stopping this virus. It will go through a rigorous approval process before it is distributed. We understand that some people may be concerned about getting vaccinated once a COVID-19 vaccine is available in the United States. While these vaccines are being developed as quickly as possible, routine processes and procedures remain in place to ensure the safety of any vaccine that is authorized or approved for use. Safety is a top priority, and there are many reasons to get vaccinated.
HOW WILL THE COVID-19 VACCINE PROTECT ME?

Getting COVID-19 may offer some natural protection, known as immunity. But experts don’t know how long this protection lasts, and the risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 far outweighs any benefits of natural immunity. COVID-19 vaccination will help protect you by creating an antibody response without having to experience sickness.

Both natural immunity and immunity produced by a vaccine are important aspects of COVID-19 that experts are trying to learn more about, and CDC will keep the public informed as new evidence becomes available.

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information, view the Department of Health’s Interim Vaccination Plan

More information on COVID-19 can be found on the department’s website: www.health.pa.gov

Date Created: 12/1/2020
#COVID19 vaccines are not going to be the cure, but another tool in the COVID-19 toolkit. Clinical studies show that getting a COVID-19 vaccine may help keep you from getting seriously ill even if you do get the virus, like the #flu vaccine. #VaccinesWork

There’s a lot of information being released about the different #COVID19 vaccines in development—and you probably have a lot of questions. Check out our COVID-19 vaccine frequently asked questions: https://bit.ly/PACOVID19Vaccine

Vaccines are safe and effective—and the best way to protect yourself and your family from serious diseases. Getting your vaccinations can help protect others, like those with compromised immune systems, who can't get vaccinated. #VaccinesWork #protectedtogether

Staying masked up and getting the #COVID19 vaccine each offer their own protections from the virus. Add the #COVID19 vaccine to your toolkit. Stay masked up. #StopTheSpread #ProtectedTogether

In addition to the #COVID-19 vaccine, taking steps like wearing a mask, washing your hands, social distancing and downloading COVID Alert PA will help slow the spread of COVID-19 in your community #VaccinesWork #protectedtogether
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