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Racine County Prepares for COVID-19 Vaccinations

Local public health planning for vaccination clinics; initial vaccine allocations to be small and distributed in phases, beginning with health care workers and long-term care residents

December 11, 2020 – The Central Racine County and City of Racine Public Health Departments, along with the Racine County Emergency Operations Center (EOC), are preparing for COVID-19 vaccinations in coordination with other local partners.

The vaccination planning process starts at the federal level, moves to the state level, and then information is shared with local partners for planning and implementation. Initial vaccine is expected to be scarce, and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services oversees and determines vaccine allocations based on guidance from Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and Wisconsin State Disaster Medical Advisory Committee (SDMAC). It is not known how much vaccine Racine County will initially receive or which healthcare providers will receive vaccine during the early rollout.

Still, local officials are working collaboratively to prepare for the eventual distribution of the vaccine in Racine County. They are urging residents to remain patient and continue to follow all public health measures to slow further COVID-19 transmission until the vaccine is widely distributed.

“Local public health departments have historically provided a safety net for provision of vaccines for those unable to be vaccinated through their primary care provider or local pharmacy,” said Margaret Gesner, Health Officer for Central Racine County Health Department. “We expect to fill the same role for the COVID-19 vaccination campaign as well as providing assurance and education. Vaccines will help tremendously in the effort to prevent disease and death from COVID-19.”

“As during the H1N1 epidemic, the Racine County local health departments are collaborating to provide COVID-19 vaccination,” according to Dottie-Kay Bowersox, Public Health Administrator for City of Racine Public Health Department. “The situation remains very fluid and as information becomes available, we are working on logistics such as education, storage, handling, administration, medical orders, and training. All logistics need to be in place in order to be able to even start vaccine provision for some priority populations.”

“Distributing the COVID vaccine safely, efficiently, and equitably requires an all-hands-on-deck effort – and we are confident we will be ready to meet the moment,” County Executive Jonathan Delagrave said. “While there are legitimate reasons to be hopeful and optimistic, we also must be clear that the vaccine will not arrive overnight. Many factors are still unknown and dependent on further direction from the federal and state government. We are continuing to do all we can to prepare for the COVID vaccine with our partners in health care, public health, all levels of government, and the private sector.”

“We are all anxiously awaiting the day we can get vaccinated, and when that time comes, the health of our community depends on everyone getting vaccinated. When you get vaccinated, you are literally helping us save lives,” said Mayor Cory Mason. “However, until that time comes, we must stay vigilant and continue to wear our masks, social distance around others, don’t gather in large groups, spend the holidays with your immediate households, wash our hands, and stay home if we feel sick.”

Under preliminary state and federal distribution plans:

- Vaccination distribution will occur in phases, and Phase 1A is the current planning focus. Those proposed for Phase 1A include Health Care Personnel (HCP) and Long-Term Care Facility residents. This means initial vaccine allotments will not be available to the general public during Phase 1A.
- Those primarily responsible for vaccinating in Phase 1A include hospitals and healthcare providers (for their health care workers and others identified in Phase 1A) as well as pharmacies (for long-term care facility providers and residents). In addition, DHS has issued a Request for Services for vaccination clinics.
- The Racine County health departments will help fill gaps for Phase 1A (e.g. for EMS) as resources allow, since each agency employs only a handful of nurses. The Racine County health departments do not expect to receive any vaccine or vaccinate until January 2021 at the earliest, and the exact timing and parameters for distribution are not yet known.

According to DHS, possible scenarios for Phase 1B include essential workers (yet to be defined), while Phase 1C may include adults with high-risk medical conditions and adults age 65 and older. The timeframe for Phases 1B and Phase 1C is unknown.

Phases 2 and 3 are when the general public will be vaccinated, assuming a large number of available doses and sufficient supply. The earliest timeline for the general public to receive vaccine, as reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other top experts, is second or third quarter of 2021.

Prior to vaccine becoming widely available for the public, residents will need to continue to wear a face covering in public, physical distance, avoid gatherings, and stay home if sick or quarantined.

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