



CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

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**COVID-19 CONTINUES TO SPREAD IN COMMUNITY
LOOKING FORWARD TO THE VACCINE**

MAYVILLE, N.Y.: - Chautauqua County, like most of the state and nation, continues to see more cases of COVID-19 than ever before.

“Long gone are the days when only a handful of cases were reported to us,” said Christine Schuyler, County Public Health Director. “The emergency approval of a COVID-19 vaccine has instilled hope in many who desperately need to see a light at the end of this pandemic tunnel.”

The vaccination program in the U.S. is being led by the federal government in close conjunction with state governments. The U.S. vaccine safety system ensures that all vaccines are as safe as possible and the CDC has new tools in place to increase its ability to rapidly detect any safety issues with the COVID-19 vaccines. To increase the public’s confidence in the safety of the vaccine, New York State had a separate panel of experts who also reviewed the scientific data and approved the vaccine’s use in NYS.

Because the current supply of COVID-19 vaccine in the U.S. is limited, the CDC has recommended, and NYS has concurred, that healthcare personnel working in hospitals and long term care facilities and the residents of long-term care facilities receive vaccinations first. Without healthy staff, hospitals cannot function. Long-term care residents have proven to be the most vulnerable to COVID-19 infection and complications, including death. The federal government has contracted with the pharmacy chains CVS and Walgreens and they are beginning to bring vaccines to long-term care facility staff and residents. Hospitals are receiving vaccine shipments directly and will vaccinate their staff working in patient care settings.

The NYS Department of Health (NYSDOH) is designing and managing all aspects of the vaccine administration program in NYS. The Chautauqua County Health Department has submitted a vaccine plan to the state as is required of all local health departments. The plan continues to be in draft format as the situation is continually changing as the federal and state plans evolve.

The County’s plan follows the state established phases of priority populations listed here:

Phase 1:

- Healthcare workers and Emergency Medical Services personnel in patient care settings
- Long-term care facility workers and patients

Phase 2:

- First responders (fire, police, National Guard)
- Teachers/school staff
- Child care providers
- Public health workers

- Essential frontline workers who regularly interact with the public (pharmacists, grocery store workers, transit employees, etc.) or maintain critical infrastructure
- Other long-term care facility patients and those living in congregate settings
- Individuals at high risk due to comorbidities and health conditions

Phase 3:

- Individuals over 65
- Individuals under 65 with high-risk comorbidities and health conditions

Phase 4:

- All other essential workers

Phase 5:

- Healthy adults and children

To reach each priority population, community vaccination efforts will include “PODS” (point of dispensing) clinics located at multiple areas throughout the County. The PODS would be conducted in collaboration with other local healthcare providers. Persons in each phase will be notified through press releases, social media, and community-based organizations who work with them. More information will be released as it becomes available.

“My understanding from state health officials is that the vaccine will be distributed through state designated regional hubs with a large health system in the lead,” said Schuyler. “We have not been notified of a specific timeline for when we, as a local health department, will receive any vaccine but expect that it could be before the year’s end to start with vaccination of emergency medical personnel as the priority after hospitals and nursing homes.”

On December 14, Governor Cuomo issued an Executive Order expanding the professions that can vaccinate New Yorkers against COVID-19 to include pharmacists, paramedics, EMTs, and dentists. Per Schuyler, this expansion is essential to having enough staff to vaccinate the broader population, which could be late winter or early spring.

The Pfizer vaccine comes with unique storage and distribution challenges as it must be kept at minus 94 degrees Fahrenheit. The vaccine is shipped in dry ice and then must be kept in super cold freezers. The Pfizer vaccine is two doses, given 21 days apart. The Moderna vaccine, once approved, does not have extreme temperature requirements for storage and has a 30 day shelf life. It also requires two doses, given 28 days apart.

Health officials are eager to get started. People are sick and health care systems and public health workers are overwhelmed.

“While we can see a light at the end of the tunnel, we still have a long way to go,” stressed Schuyler. “It’s critically important for people to continue to protect themselves and each other. Please wear your mask, social distance, wash your hands, and avoid groups.”

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