The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) has received a recommendation from the Rhode Island COVID-19 Vaccine Subcommittee for hospitals to begin vaccinating frontline hospital workers against COVID-19. This recommendation was made at an emergency meeting of the Subcommittee this morning. RIDOH has accepted this recommendation and has communicated to hospitals that they may begin vaccinating these workers, as soon as vaccine arrives.

Initial shipments from vaccine manufacturers directly to hospitals will be arriving on Monday and Tuesday. Vaccine is first going to five hospitals: Kent Hospital, Newport Hospital, Rhode Island Hospital (and Hasbro Children's Hospital), Women & Infants Hospital, and The Miriam Hospital. Approximately 1,000 first doses are going to each facility.

"After a rigorous scientific review, we know that COVID-19 vaccine is safe. We also know that it is one of the most effective vaccines ever developed," said Director of Health Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH. "In the coming weeks and months, as vaccine becomes more available, getting vaccinated will be one of the most powerful things you can do to keep yourself and the people you love safe from COVID-19. We are going to work to ensure that every person in every community in Rhode Island has access to the vaccine, especially those communities hardest hit by this virus."

"We have never had a vaccine that has been – or will be – more closely monitored than the COVID-19 vaccine," said Philip Chan, MD, MS, Consultant Medical Director for RIDOH's Division of Preparedness, Response, Infectious Disease, and Emergency Medical Services. "Teams of scientists at the national level have been scrutinizing thousands of pages of technical data for weeks, focusing on vaccine effectiveness, safety, and the manufacturing process, and our own local review has happened here in Rhode Island. I absolutely plan on getting vaccinated when it is my turn."

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) granted an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for a COVID-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer last week after determining that the vaccine was safe and effective. Following the FDA vote, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), a group that provides guidance to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), issued recommendations on its use. A second vaccine, made by Moderna, will start the same process this week.

Rhode Island's COVID-19 Vaccine Subcommittee is comprised of epidemiologists, primary care providers, pharmacists, pediatricians, long-term care advocates, ethicists, nonprofit leaders, school leaders, faith leaders, and others. It was responsible for doing an independent review of the process for evaluating the safety and efficacy of the vaccine. The Subcommittee is advising on how to prioritize distribution of the vaccine to ensure that it is done equitably, and in a way that best protects the State as a whole.

"The review process for the COVID-19 vaccine was extremely rigorous, and did not skip any steps" said Kerry LaPlante, Pharm.D., a Subcommittee member and Professor of Pharmacy at the University of Rhode Island. "COVID-19 vaccines were held to the same high safety standards as every other vaccine. This may be the most important vaccine I received in my lifetime. In getting

immunized, I can help save lives and protect the health of my community, my friends, and my family. It's all of our responsibility to protect our community and the persons we love."

"Rhode Island's COVID-19 Vaccine Subcommittee was watching the process every step of the way," said Larry Warner, Subcommittee member and Director of Grants and Strategic Initiatives for United Way. "Every Rhode Islander should know that local experts and community leaders reviewed all available information about the safety and effectiveness of this vaccine, in addition to the thorough review at the national level. Getting vaccinated is going to be an important step to keep ourselves and our communities safe."

The vaccine trials for the COVID-19 vaccine involved tens of thousands of people to make sure they meet safety standards and people of different ages, races, and ethnicities. There were no serious safety concerns. (When vaccinated against COVID-19, people do sometimes develop post-vaccination symptoms such as soreness at the spot of the shot and headaches. This is normal, healthy, and expected. It means your immune system is working to develop protection.) Several systems are in place to do ongoing safety monitoring of the vaccine.

In line with the recommendations at the national level, Rhode Island hospitals have been given authorization to vaccinate frontline workers who are 16 years of age and older who do not have a history of anaphylactic reaction to any of the components of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Pregnant and breastfeeding women in high-risk groups should be offered the vaccine and may choose to be vaccinated. A discussion with her health care provider can help her make an informed decision.

Over the coming days, the Rhode Island COVID-19 Vaccine Subcommittee will continue to work to solidify Rhode Island's COVID-19 vaccination schedule. People in higher-risk settings and professions, such as nursing home workers and residents and first responders, will be prioritized. RIDOH will provide regular updates to the public, including information on when and where specific groups can get vaccinated, as more vaccine becomes available. Vaccine is likely to eventually be available at community clinics, and in doctors' offices and pharmacies.

Two doses will be needed for someone to be fully immunized. Second doses will start arriving in Rhode Island in roughly three weeks. Rhode Island expects to receive approximately 10,000 doses of Pfizer vaccine the first week it is available, and approximately 19,000 doses of Moderna vaccine the first week it is available. Vaccine will come to Rhode Island in weekly allotments over the coming months.

The COVID-19 vaccine is among the most effective ever developed. In the Pfizer and Moderna clinical trials, these vaccines were shown to be about 95% effective. By comparison, flu vaccines typically reduce the risk of flu illness by between 40% and 60% each flu season.