Department of Health announces update to COVID-19 vaccine plan and priority groups; addresses new CDC guidance for close contact quarantine

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The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) provided an update today regarding its COVID-19 vaccination plan, including details surrounding distribution to priority groups.

“North Dakota has been working for months and is ready to take action as soon as the vaccine is available,” said NDDoH Immunization Program Manager Molly Howell. “We believe vaccine distribution could begin in North Dakota as soon as the week of December 14.”

Two companies, Moderna and Pfizer, recently applied to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to authorize the vaccine for emergency use in the U.S.

The first allocations of the two vaccines will go to health care workers and long-term care residents. Vaccine will be available from pharmacies, public health and private health care providers.

The North Dakota COVID-19 Vaccination Ethics Committee, which includes a physician, ethicist, local public health representative, representative of the Department of Human Services and a representative of the Department of Health, has prioritized who should receive the limited, initial supplies of vaccine.

“Both vaccines displayed about 95% efficacy, which means they will prevent a person from getting the infection up to 95% of the time,” said Paul Carson, M.D., an infectious disease specialist and public health professor at North Dakota State University. “Both vaccines showed

excellent protection against severe COVID disease. This level of protection would put them among the very best vaccines we currently have."

Dr. Carson explained that neither vaccine has shown any significant safety concerns. Both are wrapping up the FDA-required two-month post-vaccination safety review process after the closure of the trial, which typically will find over 90% of any serious complications of a vaccine.

"The general public will likely be able to be vaccinated during the spring of 2021," said Howell. "This is dependent on vaccine manufacturing, additional vaccines being authorized for use, and uptake of vaccine in earlier groups."

"I plan to get the vaccine as soon as the health department considers me to be in an eligible group," said Dr. Carson. "I will be strongly encouraging all of my family and friends to get the vaccine, and I would encourage all of you to do the same as soon as you are able."

For more information on North Dakota's COVID-19 vaccine plan, visit health.nd.gov/covidvaccine.

CDC QUARANTINE CHANGE

Public health experts locally and at the national level are always analyzing data and making changes as new information becomes available. As a result, the CDC issued new guidance reducing the number of days close contacts will need to quarantine following an exposure to a COVID-positive individual.

The new guidelines allow close contacts of those infected to reduce their quarantine period from 14 days to 10 days. If the close contact receives a negative result from a COVID test, they can reduce their quarantine to seven days. Residents at long-term care facilities and other congregate living settings are exempt from the new guidance and should continue to quarantine for the full 14 days.

"Individuals will be able to end their quarantine after seven days if they receive a negative COVID-19 diagnostic test, are symptom free and wear a face covering or after 10 days without being tested," explained Howell.

To test out of quarantine, a person can either do a PCR test or a rapid antigen test. The earliest a test should be done is 48 hours before being released from quarantine. Individuals must continue to quarantine while awaiting test results.

Individuals should continue to monitor their symptoms and wear a face covering for the full 14 days.

The NDDoH will be working to update the website and factsheets with the new information. For more information on COVID-19, visit health.nd.gov/coronavirus.

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