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Gov. Wolf and COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force Announce Plan to Vaccinate Teachers, Other School Staff

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Education, Press Release, Public Health, Public Safety

Wolf administration, national guard and local IUs partnering to administer the J&J vaccine
Classroom learning and nutritious meals are important, especially for our youngest students

As part of the priority to safely and quickly get more students back in the classroom, Governor Tom Wolf and the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force today announced that Pennsylvania will use the Johnson & Johnson (Janssen) single-dose COVID-19 vaccine for PreK-12 teachers and other school staff.

The governor was joined by task force members Sen. Art Haywood, from the Senate Democratic Caucus, Rep. Bridget Kosierowski from the House Democratic Caucus, Sen. Ryan Aument from the Senate Republican Caucus, and Rep. Tim O'Neal from the House Republican Caucus.

"This new single-dose vaccine adds another layer of support to get students and teachers back in the classroom," Gov. Wolf said. "Teachers and staff who work with our children will be vaccinated, and I commend the task force and all of our partners for their tremendous commitment to their schools and communities."

The Food and Drug Administration and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention last weekend authorized the Johnson & Johnson vaccine for emergency use. Pennsylvania will receive 94,600 doses this week.

To quickly get the vaccine into educators' arms, the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency and the departments of Education and Health are partnering with the 28 Intermediate Units (IUs) to establish vaccine sites. The Pennsylvania National Guard and AMI Expeditionary Healthcare (AMI) will administer the vaccine. Philadelphia operates its own separate vaccine distribution. The vaccination of educators is separate from the ongoing Phase 1A vaccine rollout, which continues at an accelerated pace.

Each IU region will have at least one vaccination location with most locations starting vaccinations between March 10 and 13. Eligible school staff will receive information about vaccine locations and registration instructions. The vaccine is voluntary.

The initial priority is vaccinating school staff that have regular and sustained in-person contact with students during the regular school day, including teachers and staff providing pre-k and elementary instruction, special education, English learners and associated support because younger children are more susceptible to learning loss and their families are more likely to have childcare challenges.

"With more vaccine, we can do more," said Sen. Haywood. "This task force is making important adjustments to our vaccine rollout to protect second doses, to increase speed of vaccinations, and now to reach Pre-K and K-12 educators, all in two weeks. I thank Governor Wolf for his leadership."

"We need to be able to get our kids back to school and continue to prioritize our senior citizens with the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines," said Sen. Aument. "This plan allows us to accomplish both goals simultaneously to move our students, families, communities, and our economy forward and beyond the pandemic."

"Today's announcement, that is recommended by our Joint Taskforce, is a special initiative that is a step in the right direction," said Rep. Kosierowski. "By allocating the Johnson and Johnson vaccine to our educators, contracted staff, and childcare workers we are providing a way to prioritize the health and safety of both our teachers and our students while paving a path to get our children safely back into the classrooms."

“Many children across the commonwealth have struggled with virtual learning during the past year,” said Rep. O’Neal. “The Johnson & Johnson vaccine provides us with a unique opportunity to offer the vaccine to teachers. This will speed up children returning to the classroom full time, while not taking doses away from our senior citizens and those with health issues in Phase 1A. In addition, we are able to utilize our National Guard members to facilitate the vaccine clinics at intermediate units as envisioned in my law that is expected to be signed by the governor later today.”

The Administration is also working through the retail pharmacy partnership to ensure all early childhood education workers, including those not associated with an IU have access to the vaccine, including child care workers providing an essential service to working families across the commonwealth.

The departments of Health and Education also updated recommendations to school leaders for offering instruction based on the level of community transmission in a county. Full in-person learning is recommended in low level counties, hybrid/blended learning is recommended in moderate counties and hybrid/blended learning is recommended for elementary grades and full remote learning for middle and high schools in substantial counties. Schools must continue to practice mitigation strategies, including face coverings, physical distancing and hand hygiene regardless of the county’s transmission level.

Per CDC guidance, vaccinations are not required for schools to safely resume in-person instruction.

View answers to FAQs.