Governor Stitt Announces Teachers Moving Up to Phase Two in COVID-19 Vaccine Plan

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Thursday, December 17, 2020

PreK-12 teachers now prioritized to receive vaccine as part of Gov. Stitt's continued effort to support in-person instruction

OKLAHOMA CITY (Dec. 17, 2020) – Governor Kevin Stitt and the Oklahoma State Department of Health announced today that PreK-12 teachers and support staff will be moved up to phase two in the state's COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan. This decision was made to support teachers and encourage school districts to provide an option for safe, full-time, in-person instruction for every child in Oklahoma.

“We know our kids are struggling without being able to attend school in person,” said Gov. Stitt. **“Our teachers are so important to our children and to our state, I know they’ve battled through many challenges this year to change how they teach to try and make sure their students don’t fall through the cracks. That’s why I’m so proud to work with Commissioner Frye and the Oklahoma State Department of Health to prioritize our educators for the COVID-19 vaccine and help get our kids back in the classroom.”**

In addition to moving teachers up in priority for the vaccine, OSDH will also continue to offer schools access to testing to provide frequent monitoring for COVID-19. CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield has said schools are one of the safest places a student can be, and little evidence exists to show widespread COVID-19 spread has occurred in schools.

Increased vaccination priority for teachers coupled with the recent decision by the CDC to reduce quarantine to 10 or seven days under certain circumstances should give schools multiple tools to fight COVID-19 in this spring semester.

“This update was reviewed and discussed with state government, health and education officials as we focused on finding a solution that was in the best interest of our students, their families, our teachers and those that work to keep our schools running across the state,” said Dr. Lance Frye, Oklahoma State Commissioner of Health. **“We are hopeful this will help in our efforts to have all students return to in-person learning as soon and as safely as possible.”**

As a teacher himself, Secretary of Education Ryan Walters says he knows teachers across the state want to be in their classrooms.

“I miss seeing my students in person every single day,” said Secretary Walters. **“In Oklahoma we have amazing teachers who are genuinely missing their students. We need to get them back in their classrooms as soon as possible and getting them the vaccine as soon as possible will help make that a reality in January.”**

Today’s announcement was praised by many teachers and school districts, including Broken Arrow Public Schools which has been committed to providing as much in-person instruction as possible while offering virtual options for students who choose them.

“We cannot express our gratitude enough to Governor Stitt for making our educators a high priority in a long-fought battle during this pandemic,” said Broken Arrow Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Janet Vinson. **“In a semester where everyone was forced to adapt at a moment’s notice, our teachers have shown how much perseverance they possess and how much sacrifice they can make to keep our students learning in person. They’ve gone above and beyond to modify lesson plans and straddle the line between distance and in-person learning all while maintaining passion and a love for students. We continue to give the**

utmost praise and thanks to our teachers for staying the course, and this opportunity for them to choose to be immunized more quickly is a light at the end of the tunnel."

State Senator Adam Pugh, chair of the Oklahoma Senate Education Committee, and State Representative Rhonda Baker, a former Oklahoma educator and Chair of the House Education Committee, also vocalized their support for the governor's announcement.

said Sen. Pugh, R-Edmond. **"This is good news for teachers, students and parents."**

"It is so important for our students to be able to learn in person from their teachers," said Rep. Baker, R-Yukon. **"This benefits not only academic success but their mental health. The decision by Governor Stitt to prioritize public school teachers in receiving this vaccine is greatly appreciated by myself and others who represent our public educators. This will give teachers, parents and students confidence in staying in the classroom."**

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Last Modified on Aug 13, 2021