Governor Carney, DPH Announce Delaware's Plan to Distribute the COVID-19 Vaccine

DOVER (Dec. 12, 2020) – Governor John Carney and the Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) announced Delaware's plans to distribute the Pfizer BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine that was granted Emergency Use Authorization by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration Friday evening. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) also voted Saturday to recommend the use of the vaccine for individuals 16 and older under the emergency use authorization. CDC Director Robert Redfield must still approve the advisory committee's recommendations, but this is expected to occur Saturday as well. The ACIP recommendation and CDC sign off are the final steps in the approval process before states can begin vaccinating residents.

Delaware is expected to receive 8,775 initial doses of the Pfizer vaccine within the next few days. Upon Delaware's receipt of the vaccine, which is required to be kept at below-freezing temperatures, health care systems will be able to begin vaccinating their frontline employees within 24 hours.

> *"The arrival of the Pfizer vaccine is welcome news after nine long months fighting COVID-19," said **Governor John Carney**. "This vaccine will help protect our health care workers who are working day and night to care for the sick and save lives. But we are not in the clear yet. We are still in for a very difficult winter. Please wear a mask. It's a simple sacrifice to protect hospital capacity until we can vaccinate enough people to crush this virus. Don't gather with friends or family outside your immediate household. There is light at the end of the tunnel. Stay vigilant."*

The Division of Public Health is responsible for providing the framework for acquiring and distributing the vaccine. DPH has devised a three-tier strategy for distribution.

Phase 1a: Health care personnel, emergency medical services agencies, and long-term care staff and residents will receive the vaccine first.

Remainder of Phase 1: In early 2021, those who work in high-risk and critical infrastructure industries such as food processing, utilities, education, police and fire, those who work and live in congregate settings such as correctional facilities and homeless shelters, as well as those with certain underlying health conditions, and are aged 65 and older are likely to receive the vaccine.

Phase 2: (March 2021) Those with more moderate-risk for getting COVID-19 are eligible for receiving the vaccine. More details about specific groups in this phase will be provided as we get closer.

Phase 3: (Spring/Summer 2021) The general public can expect to receive vaccines through their primary health care providers, health centers and pharmacies as the vaccine becomes more widely available.

While DPH does not plan to mandate the vaccine, it is strongly encouraging that people get vaccinated once doses become available.

> *"The benefits from taking the vaccine far outweigh any potential risks," said **DPH Director Karyl Rattay**. "The Pfizer vaccine has undergone rigorous testing through three clinical trials that involved approximately 40,000 individuals nationwide, including people of color, different ages and genders, and those with underlying health conditions, and the*

side effects have been minimal. The vaccine will save Delawareans' lives as more individuals develop immunity from the virus by taking it."

Children under the age of 16 are not included in the initial three phases of the vaccine's rollout, as the FDA has not yet approved its use for individuals who fall into this category. More clinical trials involving children under 16 are still needed.

The potential side effects from the vaccine are similar to those experienced by people who receive the flu shot: soreness at the injection site, fever, headaches, and body aches that usually go away within 24 hours. Unless symptoms worsen or linger, there is no need to seek medical care. Pfizer reported no serious side effects from the vaccine, and there were no deaths directly linked to the vaccine itself. The FDA and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will continue to monitor the COVID-19 vaccine for safety and effectiveness and any long-term or rare side effects.

The Pfizer vaccine has a 90 percent effectiveness rate. Comparatively, the flu vaccine is generally 40 to 60 percent effective. The COVID-19 vaccine does not contain a live virus and cannot give individuals the coronavirus.

The Pfizer vaccine does require two doses spaced about three weeks a part to be effective. The same brand of vaccine must be administered for both doses. DPH plans to remind individuals to get their second dose of the vaccine by sending reminder letters, providing automated phone calls and text messages and by patient record cards.

DPH is in the process of setting up a Vaccine Call Center, which it expects to be operational soon. Individuals can email their questions concerning the vaccine to Vaccine@Delaware.gov. Individuals can also visit de.gov/covidvaccine for up-to-date information. Myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/ will also have data on the vaccine available.

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