Governor Stitt Announces Oklahomans With Comorbidities, Teachers and Staff Eligible for Vaccine

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Thursday, February 11, 2021

Governor Kevin Stitt, alongside State Commissioner of Health Dr. Lance Frye, Deputy Commissioner Keith Reed and Secretary of Education Ryan Walters, announced in a press conference today that starting the week of Feb. 22, the COVID-19 vaccine will be available to the next priority groups in Phase 2 of the state's vaccine distribution plan: Oklahomans under 65 with comorbidities and teachers and staff in Pre-K-12 schools and educational settings.

"It's been two months since we received the first doses of the COVID vaccine and since then, we've come a long way," said Governor Kevin Stitt. **"I am proud to announce the vaccine will be available to Oklahomans with comorbidities as well as educators and school staff. We are one step closer to giving every parent in the state the option to send their kids back to the classroom."**

Eligibility in each of these groups is outlined in Oklahoma's distribution plan as the following:

- **Oklahomans under 65 with comorbidities:** Older adults and adults with one or multiple comorbid conditions including but not limited to hypertension, obesity, cardiovascular disease, Down syndrome, diabetes mellitus, chronic lung, liver or renal disease, cancers, who are at high risk of mortality and severe morbidity resulting from COVID infection.

Total estimated population: 1 million

- **Teachers and staff in Pre-K-12 schools and educational settings:** Workers within public and private Pre-K-12 schools, for whom exposure is very difficult to control due to the nature of their institutions, and who serve an important societal role ensuring educational needs are met.

Total estimated population: 89,000

"Over the last month the state has worked diligently with our pandemic partners to get vaccines into the arms of Oklahomans who are most at risk, and can confidently say we have administered vaccine to nearly 50% of those in our 65+ group," said State Commissioner of Health Dr. Lance Frye. **"We are proud of the progress that has been made so far in protecting our most vulnerable Oklahomans, and we feel ready to make this life-saving vaccine available to two of our next priority groups that are at high risk of exposure."**

Officials encouraged Oklahomans who qualify as someone with one or more comorbidities to register through the state's Vaccine Scheduler Portal if they haven't done so already. Teachers and staff at Pre-K-12 education settings are encouraged to receive the vaccine through their school district. After registration, they will see available appointments on the portal starting Monday, Feb. 22. Oklahomans among the new priority groups should also expect to receive their second email from the portal that provides a link to schedule their appointment. The portal is one of many options to schedule an appointment. Oklahomans can also work through a local pandemic provider or vaccine event to schedule their appointment if they choose.

"We are excited that we have reached the point where we can offer more of our at-risk populations the chance for protection against this deadly virus," said Keith Reed, Deputy Commissioner of OSDH. **"It's important to note that vaccinations among previous priority groups will continue alongside new groups in an overlapping manner to reach as many Oklahomans as possible. However, widespread distribution of the vaccine to this larger group of Oklahomans will take time, so we ask that everyone remain patient with us as we work through opening eligibility to these larger populations. In the meantime, it remains vital to continue to wear a mask, wash their hands and watch their distance."**

The state also laid out its highly-localized approach specifically for vaccinating teachers and staff in Pre-K-12 educational settings. Regional Directors from county health departments across the state are already coordinating with local school districts to determine how many doses will be

needed and what locations will be best for PODS at schools.

Starting Feb. 22, OSDH and partner providers will be working to efficiently vaccinate a large portion of the teachers and staff group in a focused, two- to three-week push. The state encourages any teacher who is considering getting the vaccine to take this opportunity.

"Our goal is to ensure that any teacher or staff member who wants to receive the COVID-19 vaccine has the opportunity to do so by spring break this year," said Secretary of Education Ryan Walters. **"Everyone who works at a school plays an important part in a child's life: their teachers, bus drivers, administrators and cafeteria staff. They work hard to care for our kids — and I'm glad we're able to care for their health and safety, too."**

Members of the House also voiced their support.

"The announcement today that teachers are included in the next phase of the state's COVID vaccination plan is another step in the important process of getting our kids back to school in person. Oklahoma teachers are vital members of our communities, and their contributions to our children's lives cannot be overstated. This announcement couldn't have come soon enough," said. Rep. Rhonda Baker, R-Yukon.

"Hundreds of thousands of Oklahomans have now received at least one shot and have some measure of defense against the highly contagious coronavirus. Oklahoma continues to make considerable progress in our vaccine distribution to citizens across the state, but we still have a long way to go before reaching herd immunity. Opening up vaccine appointments to educators and Oklahomans with comorbidities will aid our fight against the virus significantly," said Rep. Cynthia Roe, R-Lindsay.

To ensure proper planning and a smooth rollout, state officials asked schools districts to begin working with their county health department as soon as possible in providing the following key details:

- Number of teachers and staff who would like to receive the vaccine in your district
- Dates and times you can make teachers and staff available for vaccination
- Any other information that might contribute to an organized and efficient vaccination effort

The vaccine is available at no cost to all eligible groups. To schedule an appointment to receive the COVID-19 vaccine or to register to receive a notification when you will be eligible, please use the Vaccine Scheduler Portal here: https://vaccinate.oklahoma.gov/.

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