Maine Submits Initial COVID-19 Vaccine Plan to U.S. CDC

October 16, 2020

With no vaccine yet approved, plan will be revised with stakeholder input

AUGUSTA- The Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) today submitted to the federal government its plan (//www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/immunization/documents/covid-19-vaccination-plan-maine-interim-draft.pdf) for distributing an eventual COVID-19 vaccine, representing the first version of a plan that will be updated and refined in collaboration with health care partners and communities throughout the state.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) gave states one month (https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/imz-managers/downloads/COVID-19-Vaccination-Program-Interim_Playbook.pdf) to develop a plan for submission by today, October 16. Maine's first version offers a framework for an accessible, flexible, and equitable distribution plan, with additional changes expected given the open questions about any vaccines that are eventually approved by the federal government. Stakeholder input will also shape the final plan and its implementation.

Maine joins public health leaders from throughout the country in urging (https://astho.org/Press-Room/Public-Health-Leaders-Request-COVID-19-Vaccine-Infrastructure-and-Administration-Funding/10-15-20/) Congress to provide emergency supplemental funding to states to finalize and implement their COVID-19 vaccine distribution and administration plans. Adequate resources are necessary to undertake this demanding and ambitious effort to protect the health of state residents nearly a year into their fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Maine is committed to working with the health care sector and stakeholders across the state as we plan for the receipt and distribution of a vaccine when one becomes available," **said Governor Mills**. "While there is work to be done, the submission of this document represents a positive step forward. My Administration will continue its collaboration with others as we build on our state's COVID response and plan for an eventual vaccine."

"Maine is committed to an accessible, flexible, and equitable process for distributing an eventual COVID-19 vaccine," **said DHHS Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew**. "We will need an approved vaccine and federal support, along with answers to many outstanding questions, but stand ready with our partners to incorporate a vaccine into Maine's effective strategy against COVID-19."

"This preliminary document represents a collaboration encompassing hundreds of hours of work that started in spring 2020," **said Dr. Nirav D. Shah, Director of the Maine CDC**. "I thank our partners throughout the state for joining us in this effort to prepare Maine for a COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available."

Maine will use three principles to guide its approach to COVID-19 vaccination:

1. **Equity**: Racial and ethnic minorities have experienced rates of disease that far exceed their representation in the population as a whole. Other groups, such as seniors and people with serious chronic medical conditions, have also been disproportionately affected. The plan includes strategies to ensure these groups are successfully vaccinated.
2. **Accessibility**: Health care providers in all areas of the state will be needed to make vaccine as easily available as possible. The plan is as inclusive as possible to maximize vaccine accessibility.
3. **Flexibility**: Given the many questions that remain about the vaccines and their efficacy in different populations, Maine's COVID-19 vaccine plan remains flexible and will be updated to reflect the latest available information.

Anticipating that supply of vaccine will be limited initially, Maine intends to use as a guide the vaccine priority groups (//www.nap.edu/resource/25917/Framework%20for%20Equitable%20Allocation%20of%20COVID-19%20Vaccine_Highlights.pdf) identified by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Science, with future adjustments expected. The Academies developed the framework at the request of the U.S. CDC and National Institutes of Health to assist policymakers in the U.S. and globally in planning for equitable allocation of COVID-19 vaccine.

Phase 1 would include health care workers providing direct patient care in high risk settings, others who work in critical infrastructure, and those working and living in congregate settings. Phase 2 would begin when supply is sufficient to vaccinate more broadly and include people with underlying health conditions, along with school staff and people in correctional settings. Phase 3 would transition

to more routine vaccination efforts in both populated and rural areas across Maine, with Phase 4 expanding vaccine access to all residents.

Maine will update the plan as more is learned about vaccine manufacturing, storage, efficacy in different groups, dosing schedules, as well as other factors that will affect the implementation of vaccination on a large scale. The vaccine distribution framework will also evolve with continued input from health care providers and various communities throughout Maine.

Maine's planning for COVID-19 vaccine distribution began in spring 2020, building on the existing network of vaccine providers throughout the state. MaineCDC'sImmunization Program has worked with partners to mitigatethe impact ofvaccine-preventable diseasesintheabsence of a COVID-19 vaccine and built on this engagement as part of developing today's plan.

"Maine's physicians have led pandemic responses for over 150 years, including the 1918-19 influenza pandemic," **said Karen Saylor, M.D., President of the Maine Medical Association**. "Vaccinations have always been a critical part of a multi-faceted public health response to illness. We're excited to continue working with Maine CDC's team on a plan to protect the health and safety of all Mainers, including older adults, and others most at risk, including Maine's underrepresented Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian populations."

"The Maine Primary Care Association is pleased to be part of ongoing conversations about the next phase of response to COVID-19, including the planning around vaccine distribution and administration statewide," **said Darcy Shargo, CEO of MPCA**. "As the Association of Maine's 20 FQHCs, our statewide reach is significant and we look forward to ongoing collaboration with DHHS and to supporting efforts through our FQHCs to educate patients and the community on the importance of vaccines as part of our state's overall strategy to recover from this devastating pandemic."

"Understanding the impact that COVID-19 can have on long term care facilities, we are pleased to know that nursing homes and assisted living facilities will be an important part of Maine's plan when a vaccine becomes available," **said Rick Erb, president of the Maine Health Care Association**. "Maine Health Care Association has appreciated the opportunity to discuss these next steps and looks forward to continued collaboration on the plan with State officials."

"Since COVID hit the state, Maine's essential migrant and seasonal farmworkers and growers have collaborated with the Mills Administration and many other public and private partners to prevent COVID spread in congregate housing environments where workers live," **said Lisa Tapert, CEO of the Maine Mobile Health Program**. "These partners have enabled those affected by COVID to receive medical and social support whenever and wherever needed. MMHP is deeply grateful for this partnership. We have also been involved in the more recent planning with Maine CDC around the vaccine and look forward to partnering once the vaccine arrives. MMHP feels confident that the plan will serve Maine well in protecting the most vulnerable in the state."

View Maine's COVID-19 Interim Draft Vaccination Plan in PDF (https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/immunization/documents/covid-19-vaccination-plan-maine-interim-draft.pdf) .

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