MDHHS

Michigan Expanding Access to Safe, Effective COVID-19 Vaccine to Michiganders Ages 16 and Older with Medical Conditions, Disabilities Starting March 22 All Michiganders age 16 and up to become eligible on April 5

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LANSING, MICH. To continue progress toward state's goal of vaccinating 70% of Michiganders over age 16 and bringing a quicker end to the COVID-19 pandemic in Michigan, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) officials today announced the state is expanding vaccination eligibility for Michiganders ages 16 and older with disabilities or medical conditions that put them at high risk of negative COVID-19 outcome beginning Monday, March 22. The state is also announcing that beginning Monday, April 5, all Michiganders age 16 and up who were not previously eligible will be eligible to receive a vaccine.

With the expanded vaccine eligibility, providers are still encouraged to schedule appointments and allocate vaccinations to residents based on highest risk, including older residents, essential workers, and frontline workers. The most recent vaccine prioritization guidelines can be found on Michigan's COVID-19 website.

"The safe COVID-19 vaccine is the most effective way to protect you, your family and others from the virus," said Governor Whitmer. "It will help the country get back to

normal and help the economy. Nearly one million Michiganders of all races have already been safely vaccinated. I urge all eligible Michiganders to get one of the three COVID-19 vaccines. It is essential to getting our country back to normal, so that we can all hug our families, get back to work, go to restaurants, send our kids to school, play sports and get together again. And as always: mask up, practice safe social distancing and avoid large indoor gatherings where COVID-19 can easily spread from person to person. We will eliminate this virus together."

"Over 2.7 million doses of the safe and effective COVID vaccines have been administered in Michigan, and we are well on our way to vaccinating 70% of Michiganders age 16 and up," said Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and chief deputy for health at MDHHS. "We are pleased to lay out our plan for when every Michigander age 16 and up will be able to get a vaccine. We will continue to focus our efforts on removing barriers to access for our most vulnerable to exposure and those at highest risk of severe illness due to COVID-19. These vaccines are the way we are going to end this pandemic and I urge Michiganders to make a plan to get your vaccine when you are eligible."

This is in addition to a recent announcement that MDHHS was moving forward with vaccination of Michiganders age 50 and older with medical conditions or disabilities and caregiver family members andguardians who care for children with special health care needs as of Monday, March 8. Also beginning Monday, March 22, vaccine eligibility is expanding to include all Michiganders 50 and older.
"This important step will allow individuals who are more vulnerable to COVID-19, including people with disabilities, to get the vaccine," said Annie Urasky, director of the Division on Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing within the Michigan Department of Civil Rights. "We thank the Governor and MDHHS for this life-saving expansion of eligibility and will work with them to communicate the news to Michiganders with disabilities."

"The Governor's action to expand eligibility has the potential to protect over a million Michiganders with disabilities. We couldn't be more appreciative," said Dessa Cosma, Executive Director of Detroit Disability Power. "This would not have been possible without the actions of dozens of disability rights organizations across the state and we are ready as a resource for accessible implementation and delivery."

"This is welcome news," said Michelle Roberts, Executive Director of Disability Rights Michigan. "Since the vaccine roll out in Michigan started, we have pushed for all people with disabilities to be higher up on the vaccine priority list. It really can be a matter of life or death."

"On behalf of The Arc Michigan, our many disability partners, our local chapters and people with disabilities across Michigan, I want to express our gratitude and thanks to Governor Whitmer and her administration for expanding vaccine access to Michiganders with disabilities, effective March 22, 2021," said Sherri Boyd, Executive Director of The Arc Michigan.

All vaccine providers may begin vaccinating the new priority group of 16-49 with medical conditions or disabilities by Monday, March 22. MDHHS is accelerating vaccination of these individuals due to concern around disparity in life expectancy and in an effort to remove barriers to vaccine access. Based on the anticipated amount of vaccines becoming available to the state and President Biden's directive that all adults should be eligible by May 1 , Michigan has decided to move forward with allowing all Michiganders who were not previously eligible to begin receiving vaccine on Monday, April 5. As providers are scheduling appointments, they should consider an individual's risk of exposure due to their employment and their vulnerability to severe disease in determining how to schedule appointments. It is anticipated that it may still take several weeks beyond April 5 for everyone who wishes to receive a vaccine to have an appointment.

Medical conditions that place individuals at increased risk for severe illness from the virus that causes COVID-19 are eligible for vaccination and include: cancer; chronic kidney disease; COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease); Down syndrome; heart conditions, such as heart failure, coronary artery disease or cardiomyopathies; immunocompromised state (weakened immune system) from solid organ transplant; obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 30 kg/m2 or higher but < 40 kg/m2); severe obesity (BMI **≥** 40 kg/m2); pregnancy; sickle cell disease; smoking; and Type 2 diabetes mellitus.

The following medical conditions might place an individual at an increased risk for severe illness from the virus that causes COVID-19, and are therefore also eligible for vaccination: asthma (moderate-to-severe); cerebrovascular disease (affects blood vessels and blood supply to the brain); cystic fibrosis; hypertension or high blood pressure; immunocompromised state (weakened immune system) from blood or bone marrow transplant; immune deficiencies; HIV; use of corticosteroids or use of other immune weakening medicines; neurologic conditions, such as dementia; liver disease; overweight (BMI > 25 kg/m2 , but < 30 kg/m2); pulmonary fibrosis (having damaged or scarred lung tissues); thalassemia (a type of blood disorder); and Type 1 diabetes mellitus.

Those eligible to receive a vaccine should:

- Check the website of the local health department or hospital to find out their process or for registration forms; or
- Check additional vaccination sites, such as local pharmacies like Meijer, Rite Aid or Cardinal Health (U.P. residents); or
- Residents who don't have access to the internet or who need assistance navigating the vaccine scheduling process can call the COVID-19 Hotline at 888-535-6136 (press 1), Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday and Sunday, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. or can call 2-1-1.

It is important to note that, while supplies are increasing, there remains a limited amount of vaccine available, so there may be a waitlist for available appointments. As more vaccine becomes available, the state will continue to move more quickly through the priority groups.
MDHHS follows the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for prioritization of distribution and administration of COVID-19 vaccines. CDC recommendations are based on input from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, the federal advisory committee made up of medical and public health experts who develop recommendations on the use of vaccines in the United States.

Even with the increase of COVID-19 vaccinations, Khaldun urges everyone to continue to practice preventative measures such as properly wearing masks, social distancing and frequent handwashing to reduce the spread of the virus until the vast majority of people have been vaccinated.

Michigan residents seeking more information about the COVID-19 vaccine can visit Michigan.gov/COVIDvaccine. Information around this outbreak is changing rapidly. The latest information is available at Michigan.gov/Coronavirus and CDC.gov/Coronavirus.

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