

COVID-19 VACCINE: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

LAST UPDATED: 12/16/2020



HOW MUCH VACCINE IS COMING TO LOUISIANA?

COVID-19 vaccines will be a critical tool in ending the pandemic. Two of the vaccines, developed by Pfizer and Moderna, indicate greater than 90% efficacy and this is very encouraging news.

Louisiana received 39,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine the week of December 13, which were shipped directly to the 5 largest hospital systems in Louisiana and to the Louisiana Department of Health's longtime medical logistics partner, Morris & Dickson. Additional doses of the vaccine will arrive throughout December and the coming months.

HOW IS IT DETERMINED WHO GETS THE VACCINE? WHO HAS PRIORITY FOR GETTING IT FIRST?

LDH is following prioritization guidance from the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). In Louisiana, we intend to closely follow this priority plan. The first round of vaccines will be given to frontline healthcare personnel in hospitals and residents and staff of nursing home/long-term-care-facilities.

WHEN CAN I, BUSINESSES AND/OR THE GENERAL PUBLIC GET THE VACCINE?

Because there are still many unknowns about the quantities of vaccine that will come to Louisiana and the timing of those deliveries, additional priorities have not been firmly established. This is a fluid process, and priorities may change depending on the amount of vaccine that is available to Louisiana.

It is our hope that after the first delivery of vaccines to Louisiana and other states, we will begin receiving enough vaccines to make the shots widely available. Based on conversations with our federal partners, we are encouraged that Louisiana will receive enough doses to vaccinate everyone who wants a shot.

WHERE DO I FIND THE PRIORITIZATION GUIDELINES AND CATEGORIES?

The State of Louisiana's COVID-19 vaccination plan, or Playbook, has been approved by the federal government. The plan include how different populations are prioritized for receiving the vaccine. The Playbook is published online at <https://ldh.la.gov/Coronavirus>.

Just select Vaccine Information and scroll to the bottom of the page to access the Playbook. Please note that because the process is fluid and there are questions as to how quickly Louisiana will receive doses, the priority plan is subject to change.

WILL THE VACCINE BE HARD TO FIND?

The Louisiana Department of Health has been working closely with the private and public sector on making

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the vaccine available at locations in both urban and rural communities throughout the state, including doctor's offices, pharmacies and parish health units.

Some vaccine distribution decisions may be made on the basis of need, such as areas with high COVID-19 percent positivity. However, these details have not been finalized yet.

HOW MUCH VACCINE WILL BE AVAILABLE IN LOUISIANA?

We do not know how many doses we will receive or when we will receive them. More information about distributing the vaccine to provider networks will depend on the timing and number of doses. As this information becomes available, we will keep you informed.

WHO WILL ADMINISTER THE VACCINE?

The vaccine will be administered by qualified healthcare professionals. For example, vaccinations for hospital staff are being done on site by the hospital. When it becomes available for nursing homes, CVS and Walgreens will distribute the doses to the facilities and administer the vaccines to the residents. As more vaccine becomes available, people will be able to get it at their doctor's offices, community clinics and pharmacies.

HOW AND WHEN WILL NURSING HOME RESIDENTS BE VACCINATED?

All Louisiana nursing homes have signed onto a partnership between the federal government, CVS and Walgreens that calls for pharmacy workers to administer the vaccine in long-term care facilities. For logistical considerations, the Moderna vaccine will be used in that partnership.

HOW WILL THE VACCINE BE DISTRIBUTED?

LDH has been working closely with the private and public sector, including pharmacies, hospitals and nursing homes, in making the vaccine available at locations in both urban and rural communities throughout the state. HHS has also partnered with national pharmacy chains, and expects to partner with independent pharmacies and regional chains to ensure access.

Louisiana's vaccine distribution plan is designed to ensure that all communities have just and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines and information about the vaccine.

Information about vaccine distribution and administration can change quickly. LDH is committed to transparency about the vaccine, including safety concerns, and will continuously educate the public and address questions the public may have.

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I KNOW THE PFIZER VACCINE IS NOW BEING USED. ARE THERE OTHER VACCINES FROM OTHER DRUG COMPANIES?

Moderna's vaccine candidate is the second to seek emergency use authorization from the Food and Drug Administration. The FDA has scheduled a meeting of its Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee (VRBPAC) on December 17. If it gets approval, it will ship shortly afterward.

The vaccine is likely to become more widely available for the general population in late spring/summer 2021. When this happens, having a large portion of the population vaccinated is our best shot at a return to some form of normalcy.

DO I NEED MORE THAN ONE SHOT?

The current vaccines require two doses. We will track immunization through our Louisiana Immunization Network, which has follow-up dose tracking and notification capability. Vaccine recipients will receive information cards. Providers will also be financially incentivized to bring patients back for the second dose at the appropriate time.

HOW DOES THE VACCINE WORK?

Unlike many vaccines, the COVID-19 vaccine does not contain a dead or a weakened virus that triggers an immune response. Instead, the COVID-19 vaccine contains a genetic instruction manual that tells your immune system how to respond and protect you from exposure to the actual virus.

The technology used in the vaccines is not new. It is called mRNA, or messenger RNA, and it has been around for decades. This is the first time mRNA has been used in a vaccine, but the effect is the same as other vaccines: Your body gets protection without the serious consequences of a severe illness due to COVID-19 exposure.

WILL THE VACCINE BE SAFE? WHAT DOES FDA APPROVAL MEAN?

Vaccines are approved for use by the FDA. The FDA authorization means that trials have proven the vaccine an effective defense against COVID-19. The FDA and ACIP will continue to monitor safety and effectiveness data.

No steps were skipped during the clinical trials and data review process for COVID-19 vaccines. Safety is a top priority. The COVID vaccines are being held to the same standards as other vaccines to make sure they are safe.

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WHY HAS IT TAKEN SO LONG TO GET A VACCINE?

The COVID-19 vaccine is actually being developed faster than other vaccines. This is because there is worldwide urgency. The manufacturers have been given special permission to make the vaccine while they are testing it. This means if the vaccine is approved, there will not be the typical delays between approval and manufacturing.

More resources are available to manufacturers to accelerate vaccine development because of the pandemic, but these accelerations will not impact vaccine safety.

HOW WILL THE VACCINE BE DISTRIBUTED IN LOUISIANA?

As vaccine trials continue and distribution begins, Louisiana health officials are working closely with our federal partners. Like other states, we recently submitted our vaccine distribution plan to the CDC and received very positive feedback.

Louisiana has also been preparing for COVID vaccination clinics throughout flu season. Across the state, we have been holding drive-thru flu shot clinics as a “test run” for the COVID-19 vaccine.

WILL THE VACCINE DISTRIBUTION PLAN ASSURE THAT THE VACCINE IS AVAILABLE STATEWIDE?

Louisiana's vaccine distribution plan is designed to ensure all communities have just and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines and information about the vaccine. Please look to our website for information as it becomes available: <https://ldh.la.gov/coronavirus>.

I HAVE HEARD THAT I MIGHT NEED TO GET MORE THAN ONE SHOT TO BE VACCINATED. IS THIS TRUE?

It is most likely that the vaccine will be two doses, administered 3 or 4 weeks apart. You will get the necessary information about the second dose when you get your initial vaccine. The second dose is very important. One dose will not provide protection. People vaccinated with the Pfizer vaccine will receive the second dose 21 days after the first dose. Those getting the Moderna vaccine will receive the second dosage 28 days after the first dose.

IS THE VACCINE OK FOR CHILDREN?

As of now, there is no vaccine for children. All participants in the vaccine trials are over the age of 18, although one company (Pfizer) recently received permission to include children 12-18 in trials. Until there's a vaccine safely tested for children, there will not be a vaccine for children.

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HOW MUCH WILL IT COST TO GET VACCINATED?

As a part of the U.S. government's Operation Warp Speed, the vaccine doses purchased with U.S. taxpayer dollars will be no cost to the person receiving the vaccine. However, providers may charge an administrative fee or for an office visit.

I HAVE ALREADY HAD A CASE OF COVID. WILL I STILL NEED TO GET VACCINATED?

There is not enough information to know whether you will need a vaccine if you tested positive for COVID-19 and recovered. Early evidence suggests natural immunity from COVID-19 may not last long. It is likely that, even if you had COVID-19, it will be recommended that you receive the vaccine.

Over the long term, it is possible that we may need to receive a COVID-19 vaccine yearly, the same way we do with the annual flu shot.

ONCE I GET VACCINATED, WILL I STILL HAVE TO WEAR A MASK IN PUBLIC AND OTHER COVID-19 SAFETY PROTOCOLS?

There is not enough information to know when it will become safe to stop wearing masks. Experts will need to know more about the protection the COVID-19 vaccines provide before guidance on wearing masks changes. Factors will include how many people get vaccinated and how the virus spreads in communities after vaccinations become more widely available.

ONCE THE VACCINE IS AVAILABLE AND MANY PEOPLE ARE GETTING THE SHOT, CAN BUSINESSES FULLY REOPEN? CAN WE GO BACK TO NORMAL?

The vaccine is an important step in allowing us to get back to "normal." However, communities will still monitor the number of cases, hospitalizations and deaths in their areas, and make decisions based on the most up-to-date information.