

Vaccine Update: Mar. 2, 2021

There is promising news to share in the battle against Covid-19. As you may know, the Food and Drug Administration has authorized Johnson & Johnson's one-dose Covid-19 vaccine for emergency use during the pandemic.

The scientific data shows that the vaccine is approximately 67 percent effective overall in preventing moderate to severe cases of Covid-19 and nearly 100 percent effective at protecting against hospitalizations and death.

On Monday, Maryland learned that it will be allocated 49,600 initial doses of the new vaccine. Montgomery County's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) expects to receive approximately 1,600 doses from the state sometime this week.

Pfizer and Moderna have also indicated that they are increasing production of their Covid-19 vaccines in March. Pfizer plans to deliver 120 million doses to U.S. residents by the end of the month, and Moderna plans to deliver 100 million doses. In the meantime, the Biden administration has pledged to provide 14.5 million doses to the states per week.

Montgomery County's DHHS continues to vaccinate more residents. In fact, our public health staff have administered more than 76,000 vaccinations and have consistently been in the first or second spot for the number of vaccinations given each week along with Baltimore County. These two health departments combined have administered nearly 12 percent of the doses administered across the state.

Moreover, as of March 1, the County surpassed the 60 percent vaccination mark for the 73,000 residents who are 75 and older. DHHS is making plans to move to the next priority group, which is 65 years of age and older, in the near future, but will still prioritize vaccinating older and more vulnerable residents.

Residents should also be aware that this month, the state plans to launch a centralized appointment preregistration system for the *state-run mass vaccination sites*; however, pharmacies and hospitals will still have independent registration sites and processes.

Local leaders have requested a centralized registration system from the state for more than a month, so that there would be a coordinated process for all Maryland residents. Instead, residents are continuing to spend hours hunting for vaccinations across multiple sites. County leaders have also asked the Maryland Department of Health if we could build our own preregistration site and the state denied this request.

In addition, we continue to advocate for a large-scale, drive-through vaccination site in our community and have offered the state the Agricultural Fairgrounds and other locations because it isn't feasible for many of our residents to drive to Six Flags in Prince George's or M&T Stadium

in Baltimore. It also flies in the face of an equitable model for vaccine distribution. So far, the state hasn't taken any action.

We encourage all eligible residents to preregister for their vaccination with Montgomery County's DHHS at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/covid19/vaccine or by calling the vaccine helpline at 240-777-2982. Residents can also call the Salud y Bienestar Hotline which provides information in Spanish and English at 301-270-8432 for help navigating the process.

Vaccinations save lives, so please stay the course with us. More of our residents will be vaccinated each day as our supply increases.

We appreciate your patience during this challenging time. The light at the end of the tunnel shines a little bit brighter each day, and we continue to move closer to stepping into it.

Data points

The County has vaccinated 156,782 residents (14.9% of the population) with the first dose, and 77,890 (over seven percent) are now fully vaccinated. The County has the most residents vaccinated with first doses than any other jurisdiction.

The County's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has administered 95.1 percent of first doses and 76.6 percent of second doses.

More information

DHHS has also opened a new vaccination site at the East County Community Recreation Center in Silver Spring as part of a new effort to bring vaccines directly into the hardest hit communities. Vaccinations at this site began on Feb. 21 and will continue through DHHS by appointment only. DHHS will be identifying additional sites as more vaccines become available. In an effort to reach the County's homebound senior population, it is looking into a platform to provide vaccinations.

When eligible, and based on the vaccine supply, County residents who have preregistered will receive a direct link from c19vaccination@montgomerycountymd.gov to make an appointment. People who have not received a link directly from Montgomery County and show up to a County-operated vaccine clinic will not be served.

Fraud: Two weeks ago, the US attorney filed a criminal complaint against three individuals in Maryland for a scheme to allegedly sell Covid-19 vaccines by replicating the website of a well-known biotech company. It is important to stress that no one can sell you a vaccine, no one can charge you for a vaccine, the vaccines are free, and no insurance or social security information is required.

All authorized information can be found on covidvax.maryland.gov. We encourage any fraudulent or suspicious activity to be reported to law enforcement.

Covid-19 Vax Support Center: A new support center was launched by the state to help those struggling with the registration process to the mass vaccination sites. The contact info is: 1-855-MDGOVAX (1-855-634-6829). The hours for the center are from 7 a.m.-10 p.m. As

callers reach the center they can find info on Maryland's vaccination efforts and they can schedule appointments for the mass vaccination sites once it is their turn. The center includes English and Spanish calling options, and there are over 500 advocates fielding calls.

New Centralized Registration System: The state announced that it is working on a new registration system that will centralize appointments for all of the Maryland mass vaccination sites. More information to come.

Registration issues: Montgomery County Government is aware that appointment links have been forwarded. Residents should not forward their appointment link to others, as this link is only for the direct recipient. The Maryland Department of Health has been testing a demo of the Prep Mod system for local health departments with adjustments designed to impede people from registering after receiving a shared link - this issue should be resolved now, making registration links only one-time use.

Preregistration: Although individuals in most of Phase 1B and Phase 1C are not eligible to receive a vaccination from those administered by DHSS yet, preregistration is open for those groups. Those in tiers within Priority Group 1B, including teachers, childcare workers, essential workers and individuals with developmental disabilities, as well as people in Priority Group 1C, Tier 1 (65-74 years old), Tier 2 (individuals 16-64 years old with medical conditions) and Tier 3C (essential workers not covered in previous phases and food service workers) are able to preregister on the County's COVID-19 vaccination page (www.montgomerycountymd.gov/covid19/vaccine/).

Weekly updates: Residents can also sign up on the vaccine website for weekly vaccine updates. A new Vaccine Dashboard on the site provides updated information on the distribution of vaccines. The information includes the number of vaccines received and the number distributed.

Second appointments: Second dose appointments are being prioritized because there is a recommended timeframe when one should receive their second dose. The Moderna vaccine, which the County has been using, recommends the second dose be given 28 days after the first dose. Individuals will be notified four to seven days before their second dose is needed and will be given an appointment link to set up the second dose appointment.

Telephone access: A phone line has also been established for individuals who do not have access to the internet or who need assistance to preregister for a vaccination. Residents can call 240-777-2982 seven days a week from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.
If you have general questions about COVID-19 and vaccines, please call the COVID-19 helpline at 240-777-1755, which is also open daily from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Private vaccine providers: Private providers are administering COVID-19 vaccinations at select locations in Maryland. DHHS is not involved with the appointment process for any private provider. The County website has links to information on Adventist Healthcare, Holy Cross,

MedStar Health, Suburban Hospital/Johns Hopkins, Kaiser Permanente, Giant, Safeway, CVS and Walgreens.

Links to vaccination options for Montgomery County can be found at:

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/covid19/vaccine/index.html#priority-groups

COVID-19 testing: We actively encourage residents to get tested, especially amid prevalence of new variants, as well as school and business re-openings. More information on COVID-19 testing clinics and instructions on making an appointment for testing is at www.MoCoCOVIDtesting.org. Residents can also sign up for weekly email or text updates about the vaccination program on the County's website.

Continued public health guidance: While you wait to be vaccinated, and even after you have received your shots, please continue wearing your mask, avoid crowds, stay six feet apart from those outside of your household and wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds. While the vaccines give us a powerful tool in the fight against COVID-19, we can't let our guard down now.