



# Allegheny County COVID-19 Vaccination Plan

Version 1  
January 11, 2021



Allegheny County Health Department  
Dr. Debra Bogen, Director

Dear Allegheny County Residents,

COVID-19 vaccines arrived in Allegheny County in mid-December and as we welcomed 2021, more than 20,000 county residents had received their first dose.

Over the next several weeks and months, we expect more vaccine to arrive in Allegheny County, more people to be eligible to receive the vaccine, and more sites to open to offer the vaccine. This will take time, collaboration, and planning. We know that the wait for the vaccine will be frustrating to some. We know some will see others get the vaccine and wonder “Why not me?” And we know that some have questions or concerns about the vaccine.

It is our mission at the Health Department to ensure that everyone has equitable access to the vaccine according to the best recommendations and timelines for distribution. And we will do everything we can to answer your questions and assuage your concerns. We ask for your patience.

This vaccination plan was drafted with the best available information that we have today. We fully expect that it will continue to evolve as more becomes known to us and, as a result, there will be additional versions of this plan provided. It will change as more vaccines become available, as more vaccine distribution sites begin administering the vaccine, and as procedures, protocols and policies surrounding vaccine distribution and administration improve and adapt. The plans that we have set forth today will look very different from the ones that are in place a week, a month, or even six months from now. We ask for patience and flexibility as we navigate the complicated, ever-changing and extremely important task of vaccination.

As vaccination rolls out across Allegheny County, you may be contacted by the Health Department, your doctor, your health insurer, your local pharmacy, a community clinic, a major hospital, your church, or a community organization. We are all working together to give this county the protection we have sought for so long.

Until most of the country is vaccinated, it is essential that we continue to prevent spread of the virus by continuing to wear masks, keeping physical distance, and washing hands, even after you receive the vaccine. Restaurants and businesses will continue to limit customers and operations until cases decrease substantially and many people have been vaccinated.

We strongly encourage everyone who is able to take the vaccine when it becomes available to them. We encourage you to talk to any family, friends and neighbors who may be hesitant to receive the vaccine. This process has included rigorous clinical trials and robust safety measures to ensure that the vaccine is safe and effective. Many rumors about the vaccine are not true. We encourage you to seek information from medical organizations that have accurate information. And please utilize the Health Department’s COVID-19 Vaccine Information [webpage](#)<sup>1</sup> which includes answers to common questions, information about rumors, and accurate, reliable detail about the vaccines.

Stay safe and be kind,

Debra L. Bogen, MD, Director  
Allegheny County Health Department

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<sup>1</sup> COVID-19 Vaccine Information webpage: <https://www.alleghenycounty.us/Health-Department/Resources/COVID-19/COVID-19-Vaccine-Information.aspx>.

## Section 1 – Introduction

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This plan is provided as guidance for distribution and administration of the COVID-19 vaccine throughout Allegheny County by the Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) and its public and private partners.

ACHD will follow the [guidance of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices \(ACIP\)](#)<sup>2</sup> appointed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and that of the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PA-DOH) as contained in its [Interim Vaccination Plan](#)<sup>3</sup>. The plan contains a full description of each phase.

Generally, the phases described in the ACIP and contained in the PA-DOH Vaccination Plan are as follows:

Phase 1a: During this time with limited vaccine supplies, initial efforts will focus on reaching priority populations of healthcare workers. The PA-DOH will also work with the [Federal Pharmacy Partnership \(FPP\)](#)<sup>4</sup>, which activates CVS Pharmacy and Walgreens to vaccinate residents and staff in skilled nursing, assisted living and other long-term care facilities.

Phase 1b: As vaccine supply increases, this phase will include frontline essential workers (non-health care workers) and persons aged 75 years and older. Essential workers perform duties across critical infrastructure sectors and maintain the services and functions that U.S. residents depend on daily.

Phase 1c: Vaccine should be offered to persons aged 65-74 years, persons aged 16-64 years with medical conditions that increase the risk for severe COVID-19, and essential workers not previously included in Phase 1a or 1b.

Phase 2: This includes all other persons aged 16 years and older not already recommended for vaccination in Phases 1a, 1b, or 1c. Currently, in accordance with recommended age and conditions of use, any authorized COVID-19 vaccine may be used. ACIP is closely monitoring clinical trials in children and adolescents and will consider recommendations for use when a COVID-19 vaccine is authorized for use in persons aged less than 16 years.

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<sup>2</sup> The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' Updated Interim Recommendation for Allocation of COVID-19 Vaccine: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm695152e2.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Health's COVID-19 Interim Vaccination Plan: <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/Documents/Programs/Immunizations/PA%20Interim%20Vaccine%20Plan%20V.4.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Federal Pharmacy Partnership CDC Information Webpage: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/long-term-care/pharmacy-partnerships.html>

During the early phases of vaccine distribution, prioritization<sup>5</sup> may be necessary due to limited supply:

Phase 1A	Phase 1B	Phase 1C	Phase 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long-term care facility residents</li> </ul> <p>Health care personnel including, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergency medical service personnel</li> <li>• Nurses</li> <li>• Nursing assistants</li> <li>• Physicians</li> <li>• Dentists</li> <li>• Dental hygienists</li> <li>• Chiropractors</li> <li>• Therapists</li> <li>• Phlebotomists</li> <li>• Pharmacists</li> <li>• Technicians</li> <li>• Pharmacy technicians</li> <li>• Health professions students and trainees</li> <li>• Direct support professionals</li> <li>• Clinical personnel in school settings or correctional facilities</li> <li>• Contractual HCP not directly employed by the health care facility</li> <li>• Persons not directly involved in patient care but potentially exposed to infectious material that can transmit disease among or from health care personnel and patients</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People ages 75 and older</li> <li>• People in congregate settings not otherwise specified as LTCF and persons receiving home and community-based services</li> <li>• First responders</li> <li>• Correctional officers and other workers serving people in congregate care settings not included in Phase 1A</li> <li>• Food and agricultural workers</li> <li>• U.S. Postal Service workers</li> <li>• Manufacturing workers</li> <li>• Grocery store workers</li> <li>• Education workers</li> <li>• Clergy and other essential support for houses of worship</li> <li>• Public transit workers</li> <li>• Individuals caring for children or adults in early childhood and adult day programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People ages 65-74</li> <li>• People aged 16-64 with high risk conditions causing increased risk for severe disease</li> </ul> <p>Essential workers in these sectors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation and logistics</li> <li>• Water and wastewater</li> <li>• Food service</li> <li>• Housing construction</li> <li>• Finance, including bank tellers</li> <li>• Information technology</li> <li>• Communications</li> <li>• Energy, including nuclear reactors</li> <li>• Legal services</li> <li>• Federal, state, county and local government workers, including county election workers, elected officials and members of the judiciary and their staff</li> <li>• Media</li> <li>• Public safety</li> <li>• Public health workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All individuals not previously covered who are 16 and older and do not have a contraindication to the vaccine (note that at this time, only the Pfizer-BioNTech product is approved for those age 16 and</li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup> Pennsylvania COVID-19 Vaccination Phases: <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Vaccine.aspx>

There are currently two vaccines available to the public. Based on the detail of each, different providers and locations are receiving one of the two: Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna.

The [Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine](#)<sup>6</sup> is distributed in 975 dose increments only (975, 1950, 2925, etc.). It is shipped on dry ice and must remain frozen at ultracold temperatures (-80 F). This requires special freezers. Primarily large organizations like hospitals and large pharmacies have the specialized freezers needed to meet the stringent storage criteria.

The [Moderna vaccine](#)<sup>7</sup> is shipped in 100 dose increments (100, 200, 300, etc.) and is stored at standard vaccine frozen temperatures. Locations that typically store vaccine can handle this vaccine easily. As a result, this is the vaccine being distributed to most Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), the ACHD, and doctor's offices.

Many local businesses and healthcare organizations have signed [Vaccine Provider Agreements](#)<sup>8</sup> with the PA-DOH. Once approved, these providers will be able to request vaccines through the state ordering system and begin vaccinating the populations they proposed in their agreement when they receive doses of the vaccine. Allegheny County's COVID-19 Vaccination Plan will change to utilize these providers once they become available.

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<sup>6</sup> Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine Emergency Use Authorization FDA Fact Sheet:  
<https://www.fda.gov/media/144414/download>

<sup>7</sup> Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine Emergency Use Authorization FDA Fact Sheet:  
<https://www.fda.gov/media/144637/download>

<sup>8</sup> PA-DOH COVID-19 Vaccine Providers: <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/programs/immunizations/Pages/COVID-19-Vaccine-Providers.aspx>

## Section 2 – Building on Lessons Learned During COVID Response

Allegheny County’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been a collaborative effort led by ACHD in ongoing consultation with County Executive Rich Fitzgerald. It has involved the offices and staff of the County Executive and County Manager as well as personnel of many county departments including Emergency Services, Facilities Management, Human Services, Information Technology, Marketing and Special Events, Public Works and others.

The response has also reached into the community to include elected officials at all levels, municipalities, school districts, colleges and universities, community organizations, healthcare organizations, [federally qualified health centers \(FQHCs\)](#)<sup>9</sup> and other community clinics, members of the [Medical Reserve Corps \(MRC\)](#)<sup>10</sup>, faith-based organizations, large and small businesses, and the foundation community. ACHD will continue to leverage these partnerships as vaccine distribution rolls out across the county.

ACHD has developed an incident command structure for vaccine distribution with the Health Department director serving as the incident commander overseeing ACHD and county personnel handling:

- Operations and planning including vaccine management, vaccine administration and data collection and management;
- Logistics including staffing of vaccine points of dispensing (PODs), training and related information technology needs; and
- Equity, outreach and education including vaccine education, assurance and community engagement.

ACHD has partnered with local groups and organizations on COVID response and will continue those relationships for vaccine distribution. While additional collaborations will be added moving forward, the following reflect existing partnerships in which vaccine distribution planning is underway:

- Medical Reserve Corps (MRC): This will be the primary group from which ACHD will recruit volunteers to work at vaccine PODs and to assist in other volunteer roles related to vaccine distribution and administration.
- FQHCs, community clinics, and chain and local pharmacies: ACHD will work with these community partners to supplement its own vaccination efforts. Groups or individuals needing vaccinations may be directed to visit one of these locations or utilize their staff and resources to host a community vaccination clinic. These locations will develop and implement their own vaccination plans in coordination with ACHD and will be crucial in providing community-centered care.
- Regional Healthcare Systems: ACHD will continue its robust relationship with the region’s healthcare systems, using them as resources for planning, distribution and administration, including their mobile services. Regional Healthcare Systems will develop and implement their own vaccination plans in coordination with ACHD.

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<sup>9</sup> Find an FQHC webpage: <https://www.fqhc.org/find-an-fqhc>

<sup>10</sup> Medical Reserve Corps webpage: <https://www.alleghenycounty.us/Health-Department/Programs/Emergency-Preparedness/Medical-Reserve-Corps.aspx>

- K-12 Schools: ACHD will work with school districts, including Intermediate Units<sup>11</sup>, to develop vaccination plans for public, private and parochial schools throughout the county. School districts will develop and implement their own vaccination plans in coordination with ACHD.
- Universities and colleges: ACHD will coordinate with regional colleges and universities as they develop and implement their own vaccination plans for students, faculty and staff, many of which already have robust plans in place. ACHD will also benefit from the help of health professional students (nursing, pharmacy, medical and other health care-related fields) to assist with vaccine distribution and administration. Ongoing communication has also been coordinated through the [Pittsburgh Council on Higher Education \(PCHE\)](#)<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Allegheny County has two Intermediate Units which cover its schools. The Allegheny Intermediate Unit 3 (<https://www.aiu3.net/>) and the Pittsburgh-Mount Oliver Intermediate Unit 2 (<https://www.pmoiu2.k12.pa.us>)

<sup>12</sup> Pittsburgh Council on Higher Education webpage: <https://pche-pa.org/>

## Section 3 – Vaccination Phases and Local Prioritization

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ACIP/CDC and PA-DOH created vaccine distribution phases that set forth the order in which people receive the vaccine distribution. Those recommendations were based on principles outlined in documents published by the two agencies<sup>13</sup>, and include the concept of maximizing benefits and minimizing harms, promoting justice, mitigating health inequities, and promoting transparency.

As previously noted, vaccinations in the county will follow the ACIP/CDC and PA-DOH guidance. The first vaccinations are going to those individuals who are in the Phase 1A priority group. Based on the amount of vaccine received and other considerations, ACHD is also finalizing subcategories in consultation with local health officials based on the following risk/benefit questions:

- Who is most at risk of coming in close physical contact with patients with active COVID-19 during their daily work?
- Who is essential to maintaining access to health care services; that is caring for the severely ill (preserving the medical workforce) and other essential services?
- Who, if infected, is most at risk of developing severe infection?
- Who, if infected, is at risk of spreading COVID-19 to at high-risk populations?

To enumerate all who fall into Phase 1A and either live or work in Allegheny County, the following approaches were taken:

- An online form was developed that organizations or individuals can complete to provide key information needed to plan for vaccine distribution (e.g. type of organization, number of personnel who are 1A, whether they have a source of vaccine (self or affiliated with healthcare organization)). A link to that form and instructions for its use are available on ACHD's [COVID-19 Vaccine Information Page](#)<sup>14</sup>
- Utilized state-provided e-mail lists for all licensed health care professionals in the county for outreach
- Contacted healthcare organizations such as county medical and dental associations for outreach to the respective contact lists with information about vaccine planning

Using these lists and the priority groupings, groups are being contacted to schedule vaccination visits as supply and clinic coverage allows. Organizations will receive an email from ACHD with a link to register for vaccination times through Pennsylvania's scheduling and tracking system. This link is intended only for employees identified by organizations as meeting Phase 1A criteria and should not be shared with other employees.

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<sup>13</sup> The CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report: <https://cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69//wr/pdfs/mm6947-H.pdf> and by the PA DOH in its Vaccine Fact Sheet for Phase 1: <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Guidance/Vaccine-Fact-Sheet-Phase-1.aspx>

<sup>14</sup> ACHD's COVID-19 Vaccine Information Page: [COVID-19 Vaccine Information Page](#)

ACHD has and will continue to use its first-floor clinic in the Hartley Rose Building downtown to vaccinate Phase 1A health care personnel by invitation-only appointment. Due to the need for physical distancing, no more than 80 individuals per day can be vaccinated at that location.

ACHD opened its first community POD for larger scale vaccination efforts in the first week of January 2021 at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Pittsburgh - Monroeville Convention Center. More PODs for vaccine distribution will be opened as vaccine supply increases. Every attempt will be made to provide geographic diversity in locating these PODs throughout the county. POD locations need to meet the following requirements for consideration:

- Leasable for at least a month or longer;
- Be accessible by bus, have free parking available, meet ADA accessibility requirements, including the bathroom facilities;
- Have adequate space to allow for required physical distancing;
- Allow separate entrance and exit from the vaccination space; and,
- Have ready access for ambulance if needed.

As other vaccine providers get approved, ACHD will work with these partner organizations and ask them to vaccinate groups on this list. It is anticipated that PA-DOH will approve increasing numbers of vaccinators in the coming weeks.

Vaccine distribution is also being handled independently of the county efforts by two different groups. For example:

- The hospitals in our county developed and have implement their own vaccine distribution plans for their staff. Those efforts are ongoing. Additionally, hospitals were asked recently to reallocate 10% of their vaccine supplies to offer vaccine to other priority health care personnel that are not part of their organizations - such as EMTs and they are doing so.
- Starting at the end of December, the FPP began utilizing Walgreens and CVS Pharmacy to vaccinate the staff and residents of the county's skilled nursing facilities and assisted living facilities. The effort will also cover vaccination of residents and personnel of other long-term care facilities that are regulated by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services.

## Section 4 – Administration at Higher (Greater Supply) Levels

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As more vaccine becomes available, Allegheny County and its partners will open more PODs and distribute vaccine using mobile services and pop-up locations such as community centers, churches and other locations in order to ensure that all members of the county have access to vaccine.

The department will also launch and maintain a countywide Vaccine Map (like the county's [FluMap<sup>15</sup>](#)) once the supply reaches greater level. The map will identify locations for vaccines, including pop-up events.

Allegheny County led PODs will be staffed by our ACHD staff, volunteers from the MRC, and assistance from other partner healthcare organizations. County PODs are expected to be open for 10-12 hours a day and will also include weekend hours. Efforts are also underway to ensure translation services and ADA accommodations are available using in-person or telephonic support for individuals needing those supports.

Registration for vaccination will be required through the state-provided scheduling and tracking program. The software also sends reminders for the second shot of the series via text, call or email. Registration will be available online or over the phone. Additional detail will be available as that phase of vaccination is approaching.

Many organizations are also planning their own PODs. For example, nearly all of the local colleges and universities plan to provide vaccine to their population. Some large businesses, most retail pharmacies, many health care providers, and other organizations will provide vaccine both on site and using mobile vans and health clinics.

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<sup>15</sup> Flu Map website:

<https://alcogis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/nearby/index.html?appid=2d35f555e4dc4915a771d50dc2496a10>

## Section 5 – Vaccine Availability

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Vaccine supply will increase as manufacturers produce more supply and more vaccines are approved for Emergency Use by the FDA. This is not in our control and will impact the speed at which we can provide vaccine. The [state dashboard and Vaccine Information page](#)<sup>16</sup> does provide information about vaccine distribution by county as well as numbers partially and fully vaccinated.

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<sup>16</sup> State COVID-19 Vaccine Information Page and Dashboard:  
<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Vaccine.aspx>

## Section 6 – Communication Efforts

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The public information and communication of messages, methods, and materials for use in mass COVID-19 vaccination administration efforts will be led by the Public Health Information Officer (PHIO) in coordination with the Director of Communications. The PHIO will be the point of contact on the messaging for the COVID-19 vaccine.

The [COVID-19 Vaccine Information webpage](#)<sup>17</sup> available through ACHD's COVID-19 website will be the primary place for sharing information and updates about the vaccination process. It contains a robust FAQ and Rumor Control Center. Information will also be shared through [Allegheny Alerts](#)<sup>18</sup>, a service provided through Allegheny County which allows users to receive messages via email, text message or recorded phone message, and posted to ACHD's social media pages, [Facebook](#)<sup>19</sup>, [Instagram](#)<sup>20</sup> and [Twitter](#)<sup>21</sup>

ACHD will continue to utilize its weekly briefings to communicate directly with the general public and will also use traditional means including press releases, responding to media inquiries, providing printed materials, utilizing marketing and advertising, and partnering with community organizations and elected officials to share information through their respective channels.

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<sup>17</sup> COVID-19 Vaccine Information webpage: <https://www.alleghenycounty.us/Health-Department/Resources/COVID-19/COVID-19-Vaccine-Information.aspx>

<sup>18</sup> Allegheny Alerts is a community notification system that allows subscribers to choose messages on subjects in which they are interested and to determine how they receive those messages. Free subscriptions can be created at <https://alleghenycounty.us/alerts>

<sup>19</sup> Allegheny County Health Department is on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AlleghenyCountyHealth/>

<sup>20</sup> Allegheny County Health Department is on Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/healthallegheny/?hl=en>

<sup>21</sup> Allegheny County Health Department is on Twitter: <https://www.twitter.com/healthallegheny>