



December 10, 2020

To our mission-critical workers engaged in South Carolina's COVID-19 response:

On behalf of all those who live, work and play in the Palmetto State, thank you for your continued commitment to reducing the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. We recognize this has been a long road, and it hasn't been easy. While we have not yet reached the end of that long road, hope is now present with the impending arrival of vaccines.

As work continues to produce vaccines in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical for South Carolina to be prepared to effectively and equitably distribute the vaccines once they become available. It is anticipated that initial allocations of vaccine will be limited, and even within a given phase, vaccination will need to be strategically dispensed.

In addition, we recognize that no two healthcare facilities are the same and that critical workers in high-risk settings will vary in different facilities depending on their staffing and community conditions and needs. [The Phase 1a Guidance for COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation](#) was developed to offer guidance to healthcare facilities and their staff concerning evaluating risk but avoiding being overly prescriptive in the allocation of vaccine.

South Carolina will be vaccinating those in Phase 1a as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the South Carolina COVID-19 Vaccine Advisory Committee (VAC), comprised of representatives from many groups of people in our communities. **Our overarching goal: preventing deaths.**

To reach our collective goal and stop the spread of COVID-19, we must attend to our frontline healthcare workers first. Those are the workers in hospitals and other healthcare facilities who are most critical to saving lives and most at risk of exposure to COVID-19, such as nurses, physicians, respiratory therapists, laboratory and radiology technicians, and other medical professionals treating COVID-19 patients. Ensuring those responsible for treating our COVID-19 patients are the first to be vaccinated is one way of protecting our frontline healthcare workers so that they can continue to protect all of us. Other mission-critical workers in Phase 1a include:

- First responders who provide emergency medical response,
- Medical staff in correctional facilities, dialysis and infusion centers, and outpatient settings frequently treating COVID-19 patients,
- Home health and hospice workers,
- Autopsy staff and coroners, and
- Other healthcare professionals at high risk of frequent exposure to COVID-19.

The initial shipments of the vaccine will be limited. Therefore, for the first few weeks we will need to prioritize our focus on vaccinating just those who are currently providing mission-critical work within our

hospitals and healthcare facilities and who are most at risk of exposure. In the meantime, we are asking everyone to be patient as you wait your turn to be vaccinated and to listen to your public health officials.

Additional information concerning the administration of the vaccine to all mission-critical workers included in Phase 1a, but not employed by an enrolled provider, will be provided in the next weeks, in advance of those vaccinations becoming available to you. This includes guidance for those working for enrolled providers and those who are not employed by enrolled providers. Once those enrolled providers start getting their allocation, they can immunize their staff and provide vaccine to those outside of their facility.

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) is working with the South Carolina Emergency Management Division, the South Carolina National Guard, the South Carolina Hospital Association, the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division and local partners to operationalize the state's vaccine plan, which was reviewed and approved by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and U.S. Health and Human Services.

In addition to our mission-critical workers, we also must take swift action to protect those among our most vulnerable. This includes ensuring that the patients and staff in our long-term care facilities are among those first able to receive the vaccine. South Carolina has opted into the pharmacy partnership established by the federal leadership of Operation Warp Speed and others. Under this partnership, South Carolina has allocated part of our state vaccine allotment to our long-term care facilities, which will be administered by CVS and Walgreens.

By using this partnership for vaccination in our nursing homes and assisted living and similar facilities, DHEC can focus its attention on the logistics of providing vaccine to those other groups in Phase 1a. This is being performed in close partnership with our local providers.

DHEC is confident that enough vaccines will be available for the general public within the next year. But until that time, we will continue to need to be patient and wait our turn.

Individuals included in the groups identified above as eligible for Phase 1a vaccinations should not contact any hospital or healthcare provider. If you work for an enrolled and approved provider, your employer will contact you about being vaccinated. For all others in Phase 1a, DHEC will publish information in the coming weeks regarding how those eligible individuals can be vaccinated.

We appreciate your continued assistance and understanding during this extraordinary moment in our nation's history and will continue to keep you informed of the latest information as we receive it.

For the latest information about the COVID-19 vaccination, go to scdhec.gov/vaxfacts. Additional contact information can be found on the [Phase 1a Guidance for COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation](#).

Sincerely,



Marshall Taylor
Acting Director
South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control