

COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How did you get ready to begin vaccine distribution?

A: A plan for COVID-19 vaccination was developed this fall and is updated as new information is available from federal regulators and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The first Emergency Use Authorization for Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine was issued on Dec. 11. Nebraska received its first allotment of vaccine doses on Dec. 14, and hospitals began vaccinations the same day. In the first week, more than 8,900 Nebraskans received their first vaccine dose.

Hospitals and facilities capable of storing the vaccine at the necessary temperatures received the first shipments. As additional shipments are scheduled, doses will be distributed via an existing vaccine network that includes local health departments, federally qualified health centers, community-based clinics, and tribal health care centers across the state.

Q: How many doses do you expect to receive?

A: By the end of 2020, the state expects to receive approximately 86,000 doses to administer to health care personnel, as well as residents and staff of long-term care facilities.

As more vaccine doses become available, we will expand our reach to offer the vaccine to other priority groups.

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) will continue to update Nebraskans on distribution efforts for the COVID-19 vaccine.

Q: Are you targeting specific groups for vaccination? If so, how?

A: Yes. Nebraska is using a phased approach to COVID-19 vaccination, beginning with frontline health care workers and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel, as well as residents and staff of long-term care (LTC) facilities.

The vaccine supply will be limited for some time and distribution will follow the recommendations of the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), which determines priority groups for the U.S. based on data showing the best opportunity to limit infection and to reduce hospitalizations and deaths.

Based on these recommendations, Phase 1 is divided in segments: Phase 1A, 1B and 1C. Nebraska will use an existing vaccine provider network to distribute doses to hospitals, local health departments, federally qualified health centers, community-based clinics, and tribal health care centers across the state.

The CDC is also preparing to launch a partnership with pharmacies to help administer doses to LTC facility residents and staff via on-site vaccine clinics. Nebraska will participate in this partnership to help ensure safe and effective vaccination for this high priority population, and to reduce the burden on health care facilities and local health departments.

A second phase of vaccine distribution for the wider population will begin when large numbers of vaccine doses are available. The CDC hasn't shared a timeline, but current projections are for spring of 2021.

Nebraska's current COVID-19 Phase 1 priority groups are as follows:

Phase 1A

- Health care personnel (hospitals, home health care, pharmacies, EMS, primary care, dental, optometrists, outpatient providers, mental health providers, and public health)
 - The focus is on those providing direct patient care, those who may be exposed to infectious materials, and those unable to work from home
 - Initial doses should not go to administrative staff, staff working remotely, and those not in direct contact with COVID-19 patients or infectious materials
 - All other first responders will be part of Phase 1B
- LTC facility residents and staff (nursing homes, assisted living, independent living, and skilled nursing)

Phase 1B

- Those 75 years of age or older
- Essential critical infrastructure workforce – this can vary by jurisdiction and may be determined by the local health department:
 - First responders – police, fire, other EMS support personnel
 - Education and school services – teachers, paraeducators, janitorial staff, and those with close contact to students who are unable to work remotely
 - Those in the utilities and transportation sectors
 - Food processing/agricultural workers in close contact settings

Phase 1C

- Those 65 to 74 years of age
- Medically vulnerable population – those with medical conditions known to be complicated by COVID-19, including but not limited to:
 - Anyone who has or ever had cancer
 - Chronic kidney disease
 - Serious heart conditions, such as heart failure, coronary artery disease, or cardiomyopathies
 - COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
 - A body mass index (BMI) of 30 or higher
 - Type 2 diabetes mellitus





Q: Who is in charge of your distribution effort?

A: Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is the lead agency responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The vaccination effort is led by the DHHS Incident Commander, and includes the staff of the DHHS Division of Public Health's Immunization Program.

The Immunization Program team has been working since early 2020 with local health departments and partners across the state to plan for, receive, distribute, and administer a COVID-19 vaccine to Nebraskans.

The effort will scale up to support mass vaccination in Phase 2, which is expected to include a larger network of pharmacies, primary care/doctor's offices and urgent care clinics, as well as other public health venues such as mobile and temporary clinics.

DHHS will continue to update Nebraskans on the distribution efforts for the COVID-19 vaccine.

