

CDC Vaccine Distribution Webinar for Rural Stakeholders

On October 27, the CDC hosted a webinar on “COVID-19 Vaccination Implementation Planning Update for Rural Stakeholders.” While there are still many unknowns related to vaccine distribution, and plans are subject to change, this webinar provided an overview of what rural stakeholders should expect when COVID-19 vaccines are approved for distribution. The webinar highlighted the roles of healthcare providers, including:

- Encouraging vaccination among patients;
- Ensuring patients receive the vaccine dose(s) properly; and
- Working cooperatively with local health agencies and other stakeholders on community vaccination efforts.

Below is a summation of highlights from the webinar. A recording of the webinar is available online [here](#). The CDC’s updated vaccination page is available [here](#).

Patient Populations: Once a vaccine(s) is approved, doses will be distributed to states proportionally. While the CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices will determine recommendations for critical populations to prioritize (e.g. healthcare personnel and essential workers), states will have to prioritize distribution within those priority groups. The number of doses available immediately is expected to be limited, meaning population subgroups will have to be prioritized. Vaccine doses will be purchased by the federal government, and they expect there to be no cost for the patient or provider. CMS has posted additional information [here](#) about COVID-19 vaccine/ vaccine administration coverage for Medicaid, Medicare, private insurance, and the uninsured.

Vaccine Storage and Handling Considerations: At least initially, COVID-19 vaccines are likely to be approved by the FDA through Emergency Use Authorization, which is a faster process. Providers interested in administering COVID-19 vaccines to patients should consider internal plans for infection control, security, and vaccine storage and handling. Providers should not purchase special storage equipment for ultra-cold vaccines. According to the presenters, the vaccines are expected to come in shipping containers that will keep them at temperature for up to 10 days. One of the best ways providers can help prevent vaccine waste is accurately estimating how many doses they will need and ordering accordingly. Supplemental vaccination supplies will be shipped with the vaccine doses.



Reaching Rural Communities: Depending on the number of available doses, vaccines may be first sent to select providers in closed settings (e.g. hospitals and LPHAs) for distribution to priority groups. The presenters noted mobile clinics may be needed to reach priority groups in rural areas. As the supply of available doses increases, the plan would be to expand the network of vaccinating providers. The CDC is hopeful that distributing vaccines to community clinics and pharmacies will bring doses close to as many patients as possible in rural communities. Early in the process, vaccines will not reach every rural community; full distribution will take time. Since 86% of people live within five miles of a community pharmacy, one of the federal government's strategies will be directly shipping doses to pharmacies. Through the [Federal Pharmacy Partnership Strategy for COVID-19 Vaccination](#), select pharmacy partners will receive a direct allocation of COVID-19 vaccine, once there is a sufficient supply to support broader vaccination efforts.

Monitoring and Safety: The vaccines furthest along in development require two doses. Patients must receive a second dose of the correct vaccine in the correct timeframe, so coordination and reminders will be essential. Monitoring COVID-19 vaccine safety is also a top priority. In addition to the usual reporting mechanisms, the [V-SAFE](#) program will allow early vaccine recipients to enroll to be actively monitored for adverse events for six weeks. The CDC presenters emphasized the importance of overcoming vaccine hesitancy in communities. There are some people who will reject all vaccines and some who will accept all vaccines, but most people are somewhere along the spectrum. One strategy to reduce hesitancy is for providers to be vaccinated and encourage their patients to do so. The CDC's research also suggests that people's views on vaccines/ other healthcare issues are highly influenced by family members and friends who work in the medical field (including both healthcare providers and other staff).