



Lewis County Public Health & Social Services

Health Beat

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COVID-19 vaccine distribution explained

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In December we talked about how vaccines are developed and how the phased method of getting vaccine into people's arms was determined. Some vaccines started being distributed locally last month. Let's talk about how that distribution is happening, and how to find vaccine for yourself and your family.

Distributing vaccine is kind of like the classic story of the fire triad. It takes three things to make fire burn – heat, fuel, and oxygen. Take any one away and the fire goes out. Vaccine distribution needs four things – a provider, vaccine, staffing, and a point of dispensing (POD) site. If you are missing any one of the four, you can't vaccinate people. Looking at each of the four individually, we have both challenges and successes happening.

Providers

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has required licensed vaccine providers to apply separately to be able to distribute the COVID-19 vaccines. As of this writing, many potential providers in Lewis County have applied for permission but not all have been approved. As more providers get approved, we build capacity to vaccinate more people as vaccine supplies increase. Some providers will plan to vaccinate their own staff and patients, only.

Vaccine

Many vaccines are under development, and to date two have been approved for use in the United States. Vaccine supplies are being distributed from the manufacturers to states. Federal

guidelines direct how much vaccine each state gets based on its overall population. Once Washington receives its quota of vaccine, DOH distributes it within the state. Unlike the federal total-population model, DOH uses a framework that prioritizes populations most vulnerable to COVID-19 complications, such as hospitalization and death, to determine how many doses go where. The demand for vaccines is higher than the current supply. There is not enough vaccine to go around right now. This will change. So far, just over 6,000 doses have arrived in Lewis County, where we have nearly 20,000 healthcare workers and residents over age 65 in Phase 1A and Phase 1B, Tier 1 alone.

Staffing

Staffing is a major bright spot, of course, because this is Lewis County. On Sunday, January 24, a COVID-19 vaccine drive-through POD vaccinated 1,253 people at the Southwest Washington Fairgrounds. About 100 volunteers helped make that happen, about one-third of them with only two days' notice! With Lewis County Public Health & Social Services providing the organization, more than 60 Providence medical staff volunteered their day to provide shots. 35 or more volunteers from Lewis County United Way and Rotary filled all the non-medical support roles. Just like in the last floods, United Way has once again stepped up to organize volunteers for future PODs to come. Have some free time? Sign up at this link:

<http://bit.ly/LCUWVolunteer>. Based on volunteers' reactions from this first POD, you'll be glad you did.

Point of Dispensing Sites

Here is another advantage we have here in Lewis County. We have already proved the fairgrounds can handle large drive-through PODs. Safeway partnered with Centralia Schools and vaccinated 500 people in one day. Your Health Department is partnering with United Way, Twin Transit, and Bird's Eye Medical to develop mobile PODs to serve certain areas and populations. We also have many other potential mass vaccination sites around the county – i.e. schools, churches, grange halls, sports arenas, parking lots, and other large facilities. All it takes is some imagination and partnerships. Yes, and vaccine for providers.

Finding Vaccine

Each week more vaccine arrives in Lewis County – not enough to meet demand, but at least we keep some making progress. If you have internet access, go to the DOH Phase Finder website:

www.FindYourPhaseWa.org or www.EncuentraTuFaseWa.org for Spanish. If you are eligible, Phase Finder will give you a confirmation and show a list of locations where you can get vaccinated. Do not be surprised to find no openings at first.

If you are not yet eligible under the current phase, you will be able to leave your e-mail or phone number to receive a notice when your phase is eligible. If you do not have internet access, you can call 1-800-525-0127 between 8am and 5pm, press # and someone at DOH will assist you.

Phase Finder does not put you on a waiting list. Once eligible, you will have to check back until you can make a connection with an open vaccination slot.

The key message is . . . *Patience!*

A vaccination campaign of this magnitude has never been seen before and it will take time, cooperation and patience to reach everyone who wants COVID-19 vaccinations. In the meantime, until vaccines are available for everyone, we still have the means at our disposal to prevent getting sick – the 3 Ws: Wear a mask; Wash your hands; and Watch your distance.

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