

Nearly 50K people could be in line next week when Wisconsin's first batch of vaccines is expected to arrive

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Wisconsin's first shipments of COVID-19 vaccine, expected as early as Dec. 14, will vaccinate 49,725 people in the first group of high-risk Wisconsinites: health care workers and those at long-term care facilities.

Once the FDA issues its emergency approval for Pfizer's vaccine, a move that's expected within the next week, the state's distribution will follow a hub and spoke model. That means vaccines will go to hubs within each Healthcare Emergency Response Coalition region that are equipped with the ultra-cold storage that the Pfizer vaccine requires, said Department of Health Services Deputy Secretary Julie Willems Van Dijk. From there, the vaccine will be sent to smaller clinics to be administered.

The Moderna vaccine, when approved and available, will be sent directly to vaccinators because it does not require ultra-cold storage, she told reporters in a health briefing yesterday.

Ann Lewandowski, who co-chairs the State Disaster Medical Advisory Committee's vaccine subcommittee, said the first vaccine shipment could arrive around Dec. 14.

Lewandowski, who is one of the people planning Wisconsin's COVID-19 vaccine

distribution, said Sunday on the “UpFront” program that planning is still very fluid and could change based on the course of COVID-19 illness in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin will prioritize vaccines for frontline health care workers and residents of long-term care facilities like nursing homes. Other high-risk groups will follow these initial groups, and then the general public will also be eligible, Willems Van Dijk said.

“It will take a number of months to provide a vaccine to everyone in Wisconsin,” she said. “It will take time before enough Wisconsinites have received vaccine to make relaxing preventive measures safe, but we will get there.”

The State Disaster Medical Advisory Committee is making recommendations about who will receive the first vaccine within the first round because there will not be enough vaccinations to vaccinate every health care worker or nursing home resident. Other issues will also address who gets vaccinated first. The cold-storage requirements of the Pfizer vaccine, for example, may prioritize those closest to the HERC hub.

“It’ll be both thinking about who is most at risk and targeting those first folks and how do we make sure we don’t waste a single dose of vaccine as we move forward doing that,” she said.

Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccine are two-dose vaccines. Once approved, the CDC is giving Wisconsin the first allocation of Pfizer vaccines — 49,725 doses — and holding back the second dose until three weeks later, when it will be time for the follow-up. When the Moderna vaccine becomes available, the second dose will be administered four weeks later, according to Willems Van Dijk and Dr. Stephanie Schauer, who co-leads the state’s vaccine response as manager of the Division of Public Health Immunization Program.

After the FDA approves the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine for emergency use authorization, Willems Van Dijk said the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practice will be looking at the next tiers of people to receive the vaccine. She said three broad groups have been discussed: other essential workers, people over the age of 65 and people with other comorbidities, such as asthma, heart disease or diabetes.

She added that those who are low-risk, for example those under the age of 65 without comorbidities, can expect an available vaccine by the summer months.

See the DHS distribution plan:

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p02813a.pdf>

See the vaccine tracker:

<https://www.raps.org/news-and-articles/news-articles/2020/3/covid-19-vaccine-tracker>

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