

Adults over age 65 eligible for COVID-19 shot next week

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Adults over the age of 65 will be eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine beginning Monday, but it could be months until hundreds of thousands of older Wisconsites get their shots, health officials say.

Currently, frontline health care workers, residents in long-term care facilities, such as nursing homes and assisted living facilities, and police and fire personnel are eligible. About 700,000 Wisconsinites are 65 and older. The state currently receives around 70,000 first-dose vaccines per week from the federal government.

It will take time to vaccinate this population in Wisconsin, according to the Department of Health Services.

DHS Deputy Secretary Julie Willems Van Dijk said if Wisconsin were to strive for 80 percent of the population vaccinated by the end of June, it would need three times the vaccine it's getting right now. At the current rate, the state will have the 65 and older population completed "for sure" in the next two months, she said.

"Older adults have been hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, and prioritizing this population will help save lives," said DHS Secretary Andrea Palm. "Wisconsin systems and operations are ready to vaccinate more people. The amount of vaccine we get from the federal government will determine how quickly we can get these groups vaccinated. Our partners in health care, pharmacies and local public health are ready and up to the task."

Adults 65 and older have been recommended by the federal government and discussed by the state's medical advisory committee. According to the state's health department, COVID-19 has more severe consequences in older adults and prioritizing this population will help protect more Wisconsinites from serious illness and death.

Wisconsin's hospitals and health systems, which have been on the frontline of the COVID-19 battle for the past 10 months, are eager to step up to give vaccinations.

"They have already administered thousands of vaccines and are anxious to move ahead with vaccinating their older, most at-risk patients," said WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding. "This is an important next phase of vaccine ramp-up and we appreciate this decision by DHS and the steps it has taken to register more than 1,200 vaccinators, including hospitals, local public health departments, pharmacies, community clinics, and others who will all be needed in these next rounds of the fight."

Pharmacies, too, voiced their readiness to get shots in the arms of patients 65 and older and others.

"Pharmacists across the state care deeply about public health and supporting our patients and we applaud the Department of Health Services' decision to expand eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccine to patients aged 65 and older," said Sarah Sorum, CEO of the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin.

The state's medical advisory committee will vote on the full recommendations on the rest of the second phase eligibility this week. The recommendations currently include teachers, those in congregate living, including incarcerated people, and mink farmers.



-By Stephanie Hoff

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