

# Advisory panel discusses next eligible vaccine recipients

Posted on Thursday, Jan 7, 2021

Wisconsin has vaccinated a fifth of its priority patients, and the advisory committee to the state health department is deciding who will be next.

The state will not wait to vaccinate all 450,000 frontline health care workers and long-term care residents and staff before moving on to “phase 1B” — the second phase of vaccine distribution.

Department of Health Services spokeswoman Elizabeth Goodsitt said the state will move on to the next phase as it receives more vaccine supply.

A vaccine subpanel of the State Disaster Medical Advisory Committee met this week to draft who would be included in the second phase. The 17-member panel advises DHS regarding medical ethics during a declared disaster or public health emergency, taking into consideration guidelines from the federal Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.

The committee’s discussion this morning highlighted eligible people as those ages 75 and older, firefighters and police officers, and K-12 teachers and child care workers.

Committee members disagreed if instructors should only be vaccinated if they are teaching in-person. They also posed questions regarding types of teachers, for example, asking if driver education instructors or dance teachers should be

vaccinated.

This led to trepidation around adding post-secondary instructors since some suspect the fall surge of COVID-19 was driven by students coming back to school in September. Committee members shared thoughts on whether a line should be drawn between faculty and staff at colleges and universities. They also questioned whether people should be separated by virtual and in-person instruction and if student-teachers should be vaccinated.

Committee co-chair Ann Lewandowski, who manages an immunization consortium of the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative, said the committee will likely have to “slice and dice” the teacher group before the final proposal goes out for public comment next week.

Corrections workers were the final group recommended by the federal committee that received unanimous approval from SDMAC.

But the committee also discussed adding groups to the second phase of vaccine recipients that were not included in the federal vaccination advisory committee recommendation, including 176,000 people ages 65-74 in congregate living and people who are incarcerated.

Vaccinating the 97,582 prison population received strong support from Department of Corrections Chief Nursing Officer Mary Muse, who said she’s concerned about these incarcerated populations. They wouldn’t have access to the vaccine otherwise, she said. She said those in prisons have had a lifestyle that makes them a higher risk population.

However, Rob Gundermann, president and CEO of the Coalition of Wisconsin Aging

and Health Groups, questioned whether those who have committed crimes should be able to jump the line to get a vaccine.

“It’s not a good look,” he said.

Others wanted to lump all congregate living into one group because tight, confined living spaces are a high risk for viral spread. And some committee members asked to not include people in jails. The reasoning being that the high turnover rate would make tracking down individuals for a second dose difficult.

Other populations that could get the OK for a vaccine are those working in public transit, grocery stores, and the food and agriculture industry.

By that point, Dr. Jim Conway, a professor at the UW-Madison School of Medicine & Public Health, said half of the state’s adult population would be included in the second phase — about 2.5 million people — which would make administering the vaccine “impossible.”

The committee will meet again on Friday morning.

*-By Stephanie Hoff*

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