

Public Health Madison & Dane County: Local health systems having success in vaccinating unaffiliated frontline healthcare workers in Dane County

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Public Health Madison & Dane County continues to match Tier 1A frontline healthcare workers who are not affiliated with a major health system to vaccinators in an effort to help them get COVID-19 vaccine.

These healthcare workers, by definition, have risk of exposure to COVID-19 and include EMS first responders, school nurses and home health aides. Approximately 8,000 frontline healthcare workers in Dane County are eligible for the first tier of vaccinations.

“At this time, when demand is high and vaccine supply is limited, Dane County is carefully following the guidance of the Wisconsin State Disaster Medical Advisory Committee (SDMAC) and facilitating vaccinations only to residents of long-term care facilities and health care personnel,” said Janel Heinrich, director, Public Health Madison & Dane County. “There are many individuals within Tier 1A who have not yet had their chance to be vaccinated.”

Public Health Madison & Dane County has been vaccinating EMS workers and other eligible people for weeks since receiving a limited amount of the vaccine. Given the volume of people who need to be vaccinated and the amount of vaccines available

to the department, it is partnering with local health systems, UnityPoint Health–Meriter, SSM Health, Stoughton Health, UW Health and Group Health Cooperative of South Central Wisconsin to vaccinate other healthcare workers who are a crucial part of our community.

The Public Health Madison & Dane County [webpage](#) provides a link to determine who is considered a frontline healthcare worker in Tier 1a. Those who are still uncertain if they meet the definition after consulting the link can reach out to Public Health by emailing coronavirus@publichealthmdc.com. Those who qualify are able to register on the website so they can be matched with a vaccinator.

Earlier this week the state Department of Health Services announced police and fire department personnel in the state are eligible to receive vaccinations starting Jan. 18, as a first step into the next phase (phase 1b) of vaccination. Dane County healthcare organizations and Public Health Madison & Dane County still need to complete first-dose vaccinations for unaffiliated 1a people, and will begin vaccinating police and fire personnel as capacity allows.

“I think I can speak for all of the local health systems when I say that our priority is to get this community vaccinated as quickly as we’re able,” said Dr. Mark Huth, president and chief executive officer, Group Health Cooperative of South Central Wisconsin. “Knowing that there is strength in numbers, we are happy to all work together to help get this tier vaccinated.”

“We can only move to our next tier of distribution when a critical mass of those included in the first tier have been vaccinated,” Heinrich said. “We appreciate working in collaboration with our health system partners so we can get there faster.”

As production of the currently authorized vaccines ramps up and other vaccines are authorized, availability should improve, but for most Americans this availability is still months away. This means patience and diligence to public health guidelines will be crucial to limit further spread of the virus, hospitalizations and even deaths. From frequent hand-washing to maintaining at least six feet of distance between others and wearing a mask, members of the public have the power to protect and support one another until the time when vaccines are widely available.

While there is much enthusiasm in our community to receive the vaccines, please know that only those who meet the Wisconsin Department of Health Service’s

criteria for risk can receive it at this time. Your healthcare providers cannot add you to a wait list or pre-schedule vaccination for future availability. We ask that the public please not call their healthcare providers requesting the vaccine at this time, as a high volume of calls makes it more difficult to address those patients with immediate needs.

As future tiers of vaccine distribution are determined by DHS and more vaccine is distributed, Public Health Madison & Dane County and local health systems will continue to work together to develop strategies for vaccinating eligible populations and to notify the public how to get vaccinated.