



DEEPER DIVE: Phase 1a. Health care workers fighting COVID-19 & Long-Term Care

COVID-19 Vaccinations: Those most at risk get it first.

A tested, safe and effective vaccine will be available to all who want it, but supplies will be limited at first. Independent state and federal public health advisory committees have determined that the best way to fight COVID-19 is to start first with vaccinations for those most at risk, reaching more people as the vaccine supply increases. Keep practicing the 3W's— wear a mask, wait six feet apart, wash your hands—until everyone has a chance to be vaccinated.

Phase 1a: The goal of the first phase of vaccination is to stabilize the health care workforce critical to caring for patients with COVID-19 and to protect North Carolinians who are at the highest risk of being hospitalized or dying from COVID-19.

Health care workers critical to caring for patients with COVID-19 at high risk for COVID-19 exposure based on work duties or vital to the initial COVID-19 vaccine response are included in Phase 1a.

Health care workers at high risk for exposure to COVID-19 are defined as those:

- caring for patients with COVID-19
- working directly in areas where patients with COVID-19 are cared for, including staff responsible for cleaning, providing food service, and maintenance in those areas
- performing procedures at high risk of aerosolization on patients with COVID-19 (e.g., intubation, bronchoscopy, suctioning, invasive dental procedures, invasive specimen collection, CPR)
- handling decedents with COVID-19

Outpatient providers who have an increased risk of exposure beyond that of a typical general outpatient setting should be included in the Phase 1a. This could include outpatient providers who are focused on COVID-19 patient evaluation, respiratory care (e.g., respiratory diagnostic testing centers), members of a dedicated respiratory care team, or those frequently involved in COVID-19 testing sites. Outpatient dentists or dental hygienists are included in Phase 1a if they meet the above criteria for outpatient providers.

In addition, health care workers administering vaccine in initial mass vaccination clinics are part of this first phase.

The following types of people could meet this definition.

- behavioral health providers
- community health workers
- dental hygienists
- dentists
- EMT/paramedics
- environmental services staff
- health care trainees (e.g., medical students, pharmacy students, nursing students)
- home health workers
- morticians/funeral home staff
- nurses
- nursing assistants
- personal care aides
- pharmacists
- physicians
- public health and emergency preparedness workers
- public health nurses
- respiratory techs

How do health care workers in this first phase get their vaccine?

Due to very limited supplies, vaccines were available first through a small number of hospitals. These hospitals were chosen based on bed capacity, health care workers, and county population. Additional hospitals and Local Health Departments have begun to receive vaccine in Week 2.

Local Health Departments, health care employers, hospitals and health systems all play a role in vaccinating health care workers in Phase 1a.

Local Health Departments are compiling lists of health care providers who are not affiliated with a hospital or health system and who meet the criteria for Phase 1a. Local Health Departments will pre-register eligible health care workers in the state's COVID-19 Vaccination Management System (CVMS) or can register eligible individuals at the time of vaccination.

Health care employers (e.g., medical practices, hospice providers, EMS) should determine which of their employees meet the criteria of being at high risk for exposure to COVID-19 as defined above, meaning that they interact with or care for patients with COVID-19 or work in designated COVID-19 areas (e.g., cleaning). If they are not already working with their Local Health Department, health care employers should:

- Contact their local health department to submit their list of eligible health care workers in order to pre-register employees for vaccination.
- Understand that the ability for Local Health Departments to schedule appointments will depend on the supply of vaccine available.
- Know that Local Health Departments will prioritize responding to and scheduling vaccinations first for those with workers eligible for Phase 1a and based upon vaccine availability.

Hospitals and health systems are compiling lists of and pre-registering their employees and affiliated staff who meet the criteria for Phase 1a. They also can:

- Vaccinate non-employed or non-affiliated community-based health care workers who meet Phase 1a eligibility criteria.
- Work with the Local Health Department to coordinate access to vaccine for non-affiliated health care workers for those they pre-register.

Long-Term Care Staff and Residents

Long-term care facilities include people and staff in skilled nursing facilities and in adult, family and group homes, including:

- adult care homes
- family care homes
- group homes
- Skilled Nursing Facilities
- group homes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who receive home or community-based services

How do long-term care staff and residents get their vaccine?

The federal government manages vaccinations for most staff and residents of long-term care facilities through the newly created Pharmacy Partnership for Long-Term Care Program with CVS and Walgreens. Staff and residents will be vaccinated at the same time. Other long-term care staff and residents will receive vaccinations through their Local Health Departments and other long-term care pharmacies if not participating in the federal program. North Carolina is working to enroll other vaccinating providers who may also reach this population.