



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**
Office of the Secretary

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Dear COVID Vaccine Advisory Committee Members

Thank you for your thoughtful guidance throughout this COVID-19 Vaccination process. We have started out strong and are looking forward to being able to vaccinate as many people in North Carolina who want the vaccine.

As we discussed through our planning process, revisions of our proposed framework would likely happen with further federal guidance. As you are likely aware, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices issued recommendations on prioritization of the next phases on December 22, 2020. Thank you for your thoughtful feedback on revising the prioritization framework to align more closely with these new recommendation.

The goal of the first phases of vaccination is to stabilize the health care workforce critical to caring for patients with COVID-19 (Phase 1a) and to protect North Carolinians who are at the highest risk of being hospitalized or dying from COVID-19 and those at high risk of exposure (Phase 1b). This phase of the vaccination effort will best position North Carolina to respond to and potentially decrease the surge of severe COVID-19 cases predicted by public health experts to occur over the next two months.

I wanted to update you on clarification of the Phase 1a population and the revised Phase 1b and Phase 2 population.

Clarifying Guidance on Included Populations in Phase 1a

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

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- **Outpatient providers who have an increased risk of exposure beyond that of a typical general outpatient setting should be included in the first 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.
- **Health care workers administering vaccine in initial vaccination clinics are part of this first phase.**
- **Long-term care staff and residents are also included in Phase 1a, and 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.**
 - Other long-term care staff and residents in facilities that elected not to enroll with the federal program will receive vaccinations through their Local Health Departments and other long-term care pharmacies. North Carolina is working to enroll other vaccinating providers who may also reach this population.
- **A more detailed description of who may be included in Phase 1a is included in the [Deeper Dive \(Phase 1a\) fact sheet](#).**
 - ***Any health care worker providing direct patient care not included in Phase 1a will be included in Phase 1b.***

Revised Guidance on Included Populations in Phase 1b

On December 22, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) released [updated interim vaccine prioritization recommendations](#) for the next phases (1b and 1c) of vaccinations in priority order. Specifically, ACIP updated recommendation is that the COVID-19 vaccine be offered to:

- Phase 1b:
 - Persons aged ≥75 years
 - Frontline essential workers
- Phase 1c:
 - Persons aged 65-74 years old
 - Persons aged 16 to 64 years with high-risk medical conditions
 - Essential workers who have not yet been vaccinated

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) has subsequently revised its Phase 1b and Phase 2 vaccination rollout prioritization plan to more closely align with the ACIP recommendations.

Revised NC Phase 1b Vaccine Prioritization, effective December 30, 2020:

There is not enough vaccine for everyone in this phase to be vaccinated at the same time. Vaccinations will be available to groups in the following order. The populations in each group include people in congregate and community settings.

- *Group 1: Anyone 75 years and older*

- *Group 2:* Health care workers (not vaccinated in Phase 1a) and frontline essential workers 50 years or older
 - [ACIP defines frontline workers](#) as those whose job is essential for the COVID-19 response and who work in a setting that puts them at risk for being exposed to COVID-19, including:
 - First responders (e.g., firefighters and police officers)
 - Corrections officers
 - Food and agricultural workers
 - U.S. Postal Service workers
 - Manufacturing workers
 - Grocery store workers
 - Public transit workers
 - Education and child care workers (teachers, support staff, day care).
- *Group 3:* Health care workers (not vaccinated in Phase 1a) and frontline essential workers (as defined above) of any age

Revised NC Phase 2 Vaccine Prioritization (to align with ACIP's 1c):

The populations in each group include people in congregate and community settings.

- *Group 1:* Anyone 65-75 years old
- *Group 2:* Anyone aged 16 to 64 years with one or more high-risk medical conditions [as defined by CDC](#)
- *Group 3:* Anyone who is incarcerated or living in other congregate settings who is not already vaccinated due to age, medical condition or job function
- *Group 4:* Essential workers who have not yet been vaccinated in Phase 1b

Estimated Timeline for Opening Vaccination to Additional Populations in Phase 1b

Because currently there is not enough vaccine for everyone to be vaccinated at the same time, NCDHHS will open vaccinations in groups, starting with Phase 1b, Group 1 – persons above the age of 75 – in order to best manage vaccine dose availability.

NCDHHS expects that North Carolina may move to Phase 1b and begin vaccinating adults 75 years or older in Group 1 as early as during the week of January 4th, 2021. However, this timeline is subject to change based on vaccine availability.

Additional Phase 1b vaccination guidance is forthcoming. NCDHHS will alert enrolled providers and publicly communicate when North Carolina will open vaccinations for each group within Phase 1b.