

# **VDH Plan for Equitable Distribution of COVID-19 Vaccine**

Division of Immunization, Office of Epidemiology

Virginia Department of Health

December 2020

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### **Introduction**

Item 299 I of the 2020 Appropriation Act, passed by the General Assembly and signed by the Governor, requires the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) to convene a work group to (i) evaluate the methods by which vaccines and other medications necessary to treat or prevent the spread of COVID-19 are made available to the public, (ii) identify and develop a plan to implement specific actions necessary to ensure such vaccines and other medications are equitably distributed in the Commonwealth to ensure all residents of the Commonwealth are able to access such vaccines and other medications, and (iii) make recommendations for any statutory, regulatory, or budgetary actions necessary to implement such plan. Item 299 I further requires that the work group include the Commonwealth's Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer and representatives of the Office of Health Equity at VDH, the Department of Emergency Management, and such other stakeholders as the department shall deem appropriate and which may be an existing work group or other entity previously convened for a related purpose. Finally, Item 299 I requires VDH to make an initial report on its activities and any findings to the Chairs of the House Committee on Health, Welfare and Institutions and the Senate Committee on Education and Health by December 1, 2020, and shall report monthly thereafter.

### **Background**

In March 2020, the Commonwealth of Virginia established a unified command system to manage the state-level response to COVID-19. In June 2020, the Vaccine Unit was formed under the Public Health Surveillance and Guidance Workgroup to conduct planning and coordination of COVID-19 vaccination. In August 2020, the Vaccine Unit established a COVID-19 [Vaccine Advisory Workgroup](#), made up of a diverse group of stakeholders, to provide ongoing input regarding vaccination planning and communications using a health equity lens. This past fall, the VDH developed Virginia's interim draft COVID-19 vaccination plan, which was exercised with partner state agencies. This plan will continue to be updated in collaboration with local health districts, the Virginia Emergency Support Team, and the COVID-19 Vaccine Advisory Workgroup as the federal government shares additional details and more information becomes available about COVID-19 vaccines. The most current information, including the full version of Virginia's interim draft COVID-19 vaccination plan, is available at <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/immunization/covid19vaccine/>.

### **Findings**

#### *Vaccine Availability*

No COVID-19 vaccines have been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use at the time of this report. Two manufacturers have supplied preliminary safety and effectiveness information in press releases. Pfizer submitted its application, including trial data, to the FDA requesting emergency use authorization (EUA) on November 20, 2020. The FDA's Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee will meet December 10, 2020, to review and make a decision on approval of the vaccine. Moderna is expected to apply for a EUA with FDA for a second vaccine in the coming weeks. If either or both vaccines are approved for use, availability will be limited at first.

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### *Vaccine Distribution*

The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), the National Institutes of Health, and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine are working to determine populations of focus for COVID-19 vaccination and to ensure equity in access to COVID-19 vaccination availability across the United States. CDC has established an ACIP work group to review evidence on COVID-19 epidemiology and burden, as well as COVID-19 vaccine safety, vaccine efficacy, evidence quality, and implementation issues, to inform recommendations for COVID-19 vaccination policy. A key policy goal is to determine critical populations for COVID-19 vaccination, including those groups identified to receive the first available doses of COVID-19 vaccine when supply is expected to be limited. After a period of potentially limited vaccine supply, supply will likely increase quickly allowing vaccination efforts to be expanded to include additional critical populations, as well as the general public. VDH has developed plans to ensure equitable access to vaccination for each of the critical populations identified below.

In the event that Virginia's allocation during Phase 1 is insufficient to vaccinate all those included in the initial populations of focus, the Virginia Unified Command will identify and estimate the subset groups (i.e., Phase 1-A, Phase 1-B) within these initial populations of focus to determine who will receive the first available doses of COVID-19 vaccine. The Virginia Unified Command will review current ACIP work group considerations for assistance in identifying, prioritizing, and estimating Phase 1 subpopulation groups.

### *Statutory, Regulatory, or Budgetary Actions*

The COVID-19 vaccine landscape is complex and evolving. These complexities include the likely need for a two-dose series; vaccine products not being interchangeable; varying presentations and efficacy and adverse event profiles in different populations; varying cold-chain requirements; unknown ability to administer to children and pregnant women; the need for socially distanced vaccination practices; communication and education; and distrust of public health among some high-risk groups. In order to ensure a successful mass vaccination campaign once vaccines become available, VDH will require funding to support the purchase of equipment and ancillary supplies and also will require funding for information management staffing; support for local health districts; warehousing and shipping; and a statewide communications campaign.

VDH has submitted a budget amendment request to the Governor's Office in advance of the 2021 Regular Session of the General Assembly to support funding for certain categories of expenditures through June 2022. Given the high level of uncertainty as described in the *Vaccine Distribution* section, the funding request for the following items was based on the best information available at the time:

- Equipment to support vaccine transportation, such as vaccine refrigerators and freezers, temperature data loggers, thermometers, and portable units;
- Ancillary supplies, such as syringes, needles, alcohol prep pads, band aids, sharps containers, emergency medical kits, and dry ice;
- Information technology support;

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- Mass vaccination clinics in local health districts;
- Warehousing and shipping of ancillary supplies, as well as modifications at the Virginia Distribution Center warehouse, in order to ensure efficient operations and meet Board of Pharmacy requirements for medical equipment storage; and
- A public education campaign to enhance vaccine coverage rates, including television, social media, radio, websites, billboards, etc., as well as targeted outreach to clinicians, vulnerable populations, and other key groups.

### **Conclusions**

The COVID-19 vaccination response is complex and will continue to evolve. VDH continues to update its planning on new information and expects continued adaptation as new vaccines are introduced and other considerations arise. VDH will continue to publish new information on its external [COVID-19 vaccine website](#) as it becomes available.