COVID-19 Vaccine
Frequently Asked Questions

Updated January 22, 2021

Q: How do I register to get the vaccine?

A: DHHS will soon launch a website to help Nebraskans signup to be notified when COVID-19 vaccination begins in their area so that they can make an appointment. Family members and caregivers are encouraged to assist others with vaccine sign-up if needed.

Those interested in registering will need to provide name, date of birth, an email address and phone number, occupation, and answer health questions used to determine priority group eligibility. Any information entered is strictly confidential and used only for this purpose.

In the interim, many local health departments are offering electronic signup on their websites.

If you have signed up through your local health department, you do not need to register a second time on the state vaccine registration site when it launches.

Q: I started vaccination but then tested positive for COVID-19. Do I still have to isolate?

A: Yes. Anyone testing positive for COVID-19 should isolate for at least 10 days, starting on the day their symptoms begin, or the date of their test if there are no symptoms.

After the 10 day period, isolation can end when both of these conditions have been met:
- You’re fever-free without the use of fever reducing medicine for 24 hours, and
- While some symptoms may linger, any COVID-19 symptoms are improving.

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require two doses given several weeks apart, followed by additional time needed to reach full effectiveness, so anyone testing positive for COVID-19 should still isolate to avoid spreading the virus to others.

Q: Do I need to get both vaccine doses to be protected?

A: At this time, yes. Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines authorized for emergency use in the U.S. require two doses given at least 21 or 28 days apart to reach their full effectiveness against COVID-19.

In addition, the same brand of vaccine must be administered for both doses.

The Pfizer vaccine was 95% effective and the Moderna vaccine 94% effective in phase three clinical trials, compared to flu vaccines which are generally 40 to 60% effective.

The body will develop some protection in the weeks following the first dose, but research shows the best protection against symptoms and potential complications of COVID-19 comes from receiving both doses.
Other vaccines are in clinical trials and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) may approve a single-dose vaccine in the months to come, but while supplies are limited, Nebraskans are encouraged not to wait and to get the vaccine that’s available.

Q: What about new COVID-19 strains?

A: Nebraska is monitoring for new strains, specifically B117, which was first identified in the U.K. and has been found in the U.S. It appears to be more contagious, but does not appear to be more severe.

Medical experts believe the two vaccines approved so far in the U.S. are effective against the new strain.

Because it can spread at a faster rate and result in more infections and more hospitalizations, it is critical to continue wearing a mask and to keep your distance, wash hands, and avoid the 3Cs – crowded places, close contact with others, and confined spaces – every time you’re away from home.

Q: What’s the vaccine approval process and where do COVID-19 vaccines fit in?

A: Vaccines are tested using multiple clinical trials. The first phase of a clinical trial tests different doses and identifies any side effects, and the second tests the effectiveness of the vaccine among a small group.

If a vaccine passes the second phase, a third phase tests any vaccine in a much larger, more diverse group, where it is compared against a placebo. If a vaccine passes safety checks and appears to work well, data from all three clinical trials can be submitted to the FDA. The FDA conducts a thorough review of all data, and vaccines meeting safety and effectiveness standards are granted an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA).

Pfizer enrolled more than 43,000 people in its phase 3 clinical trial and found its COVID-19 vaccine to be 95% effective. Moderna enrolled 30,000 people in its phase 3 clinical trial and found its vaccine to be 94% effective. In December, the FDA approved both vaccines for emergency use.

Both vaccines have been determined to be safe and effective in protecting against COVID-19 symptoms, and more studies are being done to determine their long-term effectiveness.

Q: How does vaccine allocation work?

A: The federal government determines the amount of COVID-19 vaccine being sent to each state. Nebraska is currently receiving shipments of about 23,000 first doses and matching second doses each week.

Using these numbers, the DHHS Immunization team develops allocations for the state’s 19 local health departments. Allocations take into account the number of people eligible for priority groups in each health department’s service area, and factor for distance and social vulnerabilities associated with COVID-19.

The DHHS Immunization team is working diligently to ensure vaccine is distributed equitably in Nebraska. These added factors reflect the reality that many Nebraskans travel outside their county for work or to access health care, and that some communities have had higher rates of infection and hospitalizations during the pandemic.

Each week, DHHS places orders on behalf of local health departments, hospital systems and other vaccine providers based on their allocation targets. Shipments are sent directly to these locations, and typically arrive 1 to 5 days later where they are quickly distributed as needed.
Q: I’m over 75 and my doctor said I’m at high risk. Am I eligible to get the vaccine soon? (updated Jan. 22, 2021)

A: Yes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone 75 and older receive the vaccine, and Nebraska’s vaccination plan has been updated to include anyone aged 65 or older in Phase 1B – regardless of whether they’re considered high risk.

Vaccinations for those 65 and older will be part of Phase 1B, which is expected to begin by February for most areas, or as Phase 1A concludes and more doses are available.

Q: Can I be notified when the vaccine is available in my area? (updated Jan. 22, 2021)

A: Yes. Local health departments are coordinating vaccination for priority groups. While some are still working to vaccinate those in Phase 1A, many are taking the names of those in Phase 1B who are interested in being vaccinated.

Family members and caregivers are encouraged to assist with vaccine sign-up if needed.

DHHS is planning to launch a website to help Nebraskans register for COVID-19 vaccination and receive updates, scheduling information and follow-up reminders as vaccination moves forward.

The DHHS COVID-19 information line can also help navigate the sign-up process in your area, and is available at (833) 998-2275. The hotline is staffed daily from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. CT. 

*Call volumes may be high as the state prepares for new phases of vaccination, so patience is appreciated.*

Q: Where can I go to get vaccinated? (updated Jan. 22, 2021)

A: Vaccination will be led by local health departments, and those in Phase 1B priority groups interested in receiving the vaccine should visit the website of their local health department to be notified when clinics begin in their area.

Community clinics with scheduled appointments will be the primary way those in Phase 1B receive the vaccine. Some doctor’s offices and pharmacies may also provide vaccines, but while doses remain limited, the vaccine will be given in a community clinic setting to help ensure all doses can be used in the required timeframe.

Community clinics will stagger appointments to observe social distancing and have space for monitoring after vaccination.

Q: Why is one health department ahead of others in offering the vaccine?

A: Less densely populated areas may have fewer people in Phase 1A groups, so it’s likely some local health departments will be ready to start Phase 1B vaccinations sooner.

DHHS is working to distribute the vaccine equitably to all parts of the state.
Q: Are people in large cities receiving the vaccine first? What about rural communities?  
(updated Jan. 22, 2021)

A: No. Vaccine distribution is not based on location or community size. Widespread vaccination will be critical to ending the COVID-19 pandemic. As Nebraska moves into Phase 1B, allocations are based on the number of people 65 and older living in the area, and the number of people working in critical industries, however all areas will receive some quantity of vaccine.

More than 115 sites across Nebraska received initial vaccine shipments, and the DHHS Immunization team is working with local health departments to ensure that ongoing vaccine shipments are distributed equitably.

Q: Are you publishing vaccination data, the way you do for COVID-19 tests and hospitalizations?

A: Yes. The COVID-19 Vaccination Dashboard is available and updated with the number of vaccinations given each day.

The dashboard provides a breakdown of first and second doses given by age, gender, race, and ethnicity. It also reports the percent of the population aged 16 and older completing COVID-19 vaccination. Thus far, COVID-19 vaccines have only been approved for use in those age 16 and older.

The dashboard also includes a general timeline for COVID-19 vaccine rollout in Nebraska, displaying the phases and priority groups as reflected in the state’s COVID-19 vaccination plan. The timeline will be updated as recommendations and supplies are made available.

Q: How many doses has the state received?  
(updated Jan. 22, 2021)

A: By the end of 2020, the state received 86,000 doses targeted for Phase 1A priority groups – health care personnel, and residents and staff off long-term care facilities.

Nebraska is currently receiving about 23,000 first doses a week, along with shipments of second doses.

The total number of vaccine doses distributed is available on the Nebraska COVID-19 Vaccination Dashboard, which is updated daily.

Q: Who is administering the vaccine?

A: All those administering the COVID-19 vaccine must have active credentials, be licensed to provide vaccinations, and be an approved vaccine provider by DHHS.

Providers must agree to adhere to all requirements, including monitoring vaccine storage and handling, administering vaccine doses appropriately, and reporting.

For Phase 1 priority groups, COVID-19 vaccine providers include local health departments, hospitals, federally-qualified health centers, community-based clinics, and tribal health care centers.

As long as vaccine supplies remain limited, doses will continue to be given in a community clinic setting by a limited number of providers. Provider enrollment will expand as supply increases.
Q: How did you get ready to begin vaccine distribution?

A: A plan for COVID-19 vaccination was developed this fall and is updated as new information is available from federal regulators and the CDC.

The first Emergency Use Authorization (EAU) for Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine was issued on Dec. 11. Nebraska received its first allotment of vaccine doses on Dec. 14, and hospitals began vaccinations the same day. In the first week, more than 8,900 Nebraskans received their first vaccine dose.

Hospitals and health care facilities capable of storing the vaccine at the necessary temperatures received the first shipments.

As additional shipments are scheduled, doses are being distributed via an existing vaccine network that includes local health departments, federally qualified health centers, community-based clinics, and tribal health care centers across the state.

Q: How many doses do you expect to receive?

A: By the end of 2020, the state expects to receive approximately 86,000 doses to administer to health care personnel, as well as residents and staff off long-term care facilities.

As more vaccine doses become available, we will expand our reach to offer the vaccine to other priority groups.

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) will continue to update Nebraskans on distribution efforts for the COVID-19 vaccine.

Q: Are you targeting specific groups for vaccination?  

A: Yes. Nebraska is using a phased approach to COVID-19 vaccination, beginning with frontline health care workers and emergency medical personnel, as well as residents and staff of long-term care (LTC) facilities.

The vaccine supply will be limited for some time and distribution will follow the recommendations of the CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), which determines priority groups for the U.S. based on data showing the best opportunity to limit infection and to reduce hospitalizations and deaths.

Based on these recommendations, Phase 1 is divided in segments: Phase 1A, 1B and 1C. Nebraska is using an existing vaccine provider network to distribute doses to hospitals, local health departments, federally qualified health centers, community-based clinics, and tribal health care centers across the state.

In addition, the CDC launched a partnership with pharmacies to administer doses to LTC facility residents and staff via on-site vaccine clinics, which helps ensure safe and effective vaccination for this high priority population, and reduces the burden on health care facilities and local health departments.

A second phase of vaccine distribution for the wider population will begin when large numbers of vaccine doses are available. The CDC hasn’t shared a timeline, but current projections are for late spring of 2021.
Nebraska’s current COVID-19 Phase 1 priority groups are as follows:

**Phase 1A**

- Health care personnel (hospitals, home health care, pharmacies, EMS, primary care, dental, optometrists, outpatient providers, mental health providers, and public health)
  - The focus is on those providing direct patient care, those who may be exposed to infectious materials, and those unable to work from home
  - Initial doses should not go to administrative staff, staff working remotely, and those not in direct contact with COVID-19 patients or infectious materials
  - All other first responders will be part of Phase 1B
- LTC facility residents and staff (nursing homes, assisted living, independent living, and skilled nursing)

**Phase 1B (updated Jan. 22, 2021)**

- Those 65 years of age or older
- Those 18 and older with high-risk medical conditions. The CDC has identified a number of conditions that increase the risk for severe COVID-19.
- Essential critical infrastructure workforce – may vary by jurisdiction and be determined by the local health department:
  - First responders – police, fire, other EMS support personnel
  - Education and school services – teachers, paraeducators, janitorial staff, and those with close contact to students who are unable to work remotely
  - Those in the utilities and transportation sectors
  - Those in food processing who work in close contact settings

**Q: Who is in charge of your distribution effort?**

A: The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is the lead agency responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The vaccination effort is led by the DHHS Incident Commander, and includes the staff of the DHHS Division of Public Health’s Immunization Program.

The Immunization Program team has been working since early 2020 with local health departments and partners across the state to plan for, receive, distribute, and administer a COVID-19 vaccine to Nebraskans.

The effort will scale up to support mass vaccination in Phase 2, which will include a larger network of pharmacies, primary care/doctor’s offices and urgent care clinics, as well as mobile and temporary clinics.

DHHS will continue to update Nebraskans on the distribution efforts for the COVID-19 vaccine.