

Adam Crum
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PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Clinton Bennett, DHSS, 907-269-4996, clinton.bennett@alaska.gov

Shirley Young, ANTHC, 907-268-1014, media@anthc.org

Alaska receives its first COVID-19 vaccine shipments

December 14, 2020 ANCHORAGE – Alaska received its first shipment of COVID-19 vaccine last night via UPS plane. Delivery and transport of the vaccine to health care facilities across Alaska will be happening today through Wednesday, leading to the first vaccinations of Alaskans this week.

“The COVID-19 vaccine is going to help Alaskans put the worst behind us,” said Governor Mike Dunleavy. “We will begin the process of finally getting the upper hand of this pandemic and getting our lives back to normal.”

The vaccine, made by Pfizer and BioNTech, was [authorized Friday by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)](#) through an emergency use authorization (EUA).

“Alaska’s Vaccine Task Force has been preparing for many months to receive these first shipments and to guarantee safe vaccine handling according to the vaccine’s unique requirements,” said Tessa Walker Linderman, co-lead of Alaska’s Vaccine Task Force. “The task force, led by DHSS and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, continues to coordinate with diverse partners across the state on logistics. We’re ready and excited to begin.”

Initial vaccine supply is limited. Vaccine will first be available to:

- Hospital-based front-line health care workers at highest risk for COVID-19 infection
- Long-term care facility residents and staff (defined to include skilled nursing facilities, assisted living homes, and Department of Corrections infirmaries providing care that is similar to assisted living)
- EMS and fire personnel providing medical services
- Community Health Aides/Practitioners
- Individuals who are required to perform vaccinations

Determinations for vaccine allocation are made by the Alaska COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Committee and are informed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). With regular shipments of vaccine, the vaccine will be made more available and the Alaska COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Committee will continue to identify additional groups to receive vaccination. Eventually all Alaskans who wish to be vaccinated against COVID-19 will have an opportunity to do so.

UPS and FedEx started transporting the vaccine Sunday from Pfizer’s plant in Michigan to 636 locations across the United States. In Alaska, some hospitals and health care facilities have ordered the vaccine

directly from Pfizer through the State of Alaska’s Immunization Program and the CDC. Those orders are being delivered directly to those facilities. The remainder of the allocation will be received by the DHSS Immunization Program which will store the vaccine at ultra-cold temperatures pending further distribution of the vaccine across the state.

The State of Alaska is working with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) to coordinate distribution of vaccine across Alaska, including to the remote rural villages. While most states are receiving weekly shipments, Alaska is receiving the entire initial allocation this week because of Alaska’s unique geography and logistical needs. This allocation of 35,100 Pfizer doses includes 11,700 doses allocated by the Indian Health Service to Alaska’s Tribes.

“ANTHC appreciates the advocacy of the State to ensure Alaska is receiving all of our allocation at once,” said Andy Teuber, Chairman and President of ANTHC. “Alaska Native Medical Center and our regional partners are ready to receive our allocations as quickly as possible so that we can get our front-line health care workers and our Elders protected as soon as possible.”

The first vaccinations of Alaskans

Following receipt of the first shipments, some health care workers could begin receiving vaccinations either later that day or soon thereafter at hospitals and health care facilities. The Pfizer vaccine requires two doses per person, separated by three weeks. The second dose is being held by Pfizer and will be shipped later. Everyone who receives the first dose will receive reminders to return for the second dose. The effectiveness of the vaccine, studied through clinical trials, depends on people receiving two doses of the vaccine three weeks apart.

Storage and further distribution

The Pfizer vaccine requires ultra-cold storage at temperatures ranging from -90 to -60° C (-130 to -76° F). To transport the vaccine, Pfizer designed shipping containers packed with dry ice that are capable of maintaining an ultra-cold temperature for up to 30 days as long as the dry ice is replenished upon receipt and every five days thereafter. The containers include a temperature and tracking device that will ensure the vaccine was kept safe during transport. In an ultra-low-temperature freezer, the Pfizer vaccine can be stored for as long as six months. Alaska has identified where these freezers are available across the state and will be using them to store the vaccine.

More vaccine is expected soon, both from Pfizer and from a second manufacturer, Moderna, whose EUA application is currently under review by the FDA. As more COVID-19 vaccines become available, enrolled health providers will be able to administer vaccines to larger numbers of Alaskans throughout the state. Tribal health clinics, public health centers, and pharmacies will play key roles in vaccine administration. Pop-up drive-through sites and “points of dispensing” locations will be organized as well, with the goal of making the vaccine easy to access for Alaskans who choose to get vaccinated.

Additional information about the COVID-19 vaccine and Alaska’s distribution plan may be found at Covidvax.Alaska.gov.

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