



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

**ROY COOPER** • Governor

**MANDY COHEN, MD, MPH** • Secretary

**ELIZABETH CUERVO TILSON, MD, MPH** • State Health Director

December 30, 2020

Dear Hospital, Health System, and Local Health Department Leaders:

This letter provides new guidance on included populations in Phase 1b and Phase 2, which has been updated to align with revised recommendations for vaccine prioritization that were released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) on December 22, 2020. Additionally, this letter includes an estimated timeline for opening vaccination to additional populations in Phase 1b.

Hospitals, health systems, and local health departments are our critical partners in building public trust in the vaccine and the process for administering it. Therefore, as required in your vaccine agreement, you are responsible for knowing and carefully following all state guidance as to who is vaccinated in each phase.

To save lives and slow the spread of COVID-19, independent state and federal public health advisory committees recommend first protecting health care workers caring for patients with COVID-19, people who are at the highest risk of being hospitalized or dying, and those at high risk of exposure to COVID-19.

### **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  $\geq 75$  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), with input from the NC Vaccine Advisory Committee, has subsequently revised its Phase 1b and Phase 2 vaccination rollout prioritization plan (Interim Plan as posted on 10/16/20) to more closely align with the ACIP recommendations.

**NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY**

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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 the week of January 4th, 2021.** However, this timeline is subject to change based on vaccine availability.

North Carolina has received federal estimates of approximately 120,000 additional new doses per week of COVID vaccine through January 2021. Based on this information, the following timeframe for moving to each group in Phase 1b is anticipated.

***These timeframes are estimates only and subject to change based on the supply North Carolina actually receives from the federal government and local supply.***

Vaccine providers may begin as early as these dates:

- January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021 – Open to Phase 1b, Group 1 and continue 1a
  - Some vaccine providers may begin as early as January 6<sup>th</sup>, but we expect most vaccine providers will begin on January 11<sup>th</sup>
- January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021 – Open to Phase 1b, Group 2 and continue all previous groups and 1a
- February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021 – Open to Phase 1b, Group 3 and continue all previous groups and 1a

**Additional Phase 1b vaccination guidance is forthcoming.** NCDHHS will alert enrolled providers when North Carolina will open vaccinations for each group within Phase 1b. As with Phase 1a, hospitals, health systems and local health departments should coordinate for Phase 1b and health systems should vaccinate people not affiliated with their system, even if they indicated a closed system in the initial NC DHHS survey.

We encourage hospitals, health systems, and local health departments to continue proactive planning and communications efforts with the communities they serve so that individuals who are eligible in Phase 1b and Phase 2 will know how and when they can get the vaccine when it is their turn.

All vaccine providers are expected to ensure that vaccine is equitably administered within each group. NCDHHS has a specific focus on building trust with historically marginalized populations. Longstanding and continuing racial and ethnic injustices in our health care system contribute to lack of trust in vaccines. We hope you will join us in partnering with trusted leaders and organizations to provide accurate information about the vaccine.

As a reminder, you received a link to a brief survey yesterday to help with planning as we move beyond Phase 1a. **Please complete the survey by Thursday, December 31<sup>st</sup> at 5PM.** The link to the survey is:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=3IF2etC5mkSFw-zCbNftGUTpSHCZEIpo3GbSr9qi1UMUhOSUNRTjRGTKe5R1BGU1IUNIBYSTk0Sy4u>

Thank you for your continued partnership, commitment, and incredible efforts and we move into this new and hopeful phase of our work together on the COVID-19 pandemic response. Together, we will reach our goal of ensuring that every North Carolinian who wants a COVID-19 vaccination receives one.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Cuervo Tilson, MD, MPH  
State Health Director, Chief Medical Officer