



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **FAYETTE COUNTY ADAPTING VACCINATION PROCEDURES**

**Uniontown, PA** – The Fayette County COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force is updating its procedures to better adapt to the state’s vaccination eligibility expansion.

Last week, the Pennsylvania Department of Health announced the start of a special initiative to vaccinate targeted industry workers, as well as accelerate the vaccination timetable for those in Phases 1B, 1C and 2. Additionally, all Pennsylvanians will be eligible to schedule vaccination appointments beginning April 19.

The state changes have required local task force members to adapt quickly and “establish a more effective system to get vaccines out faster,” according to James Bittner of the Fayette County Emergency Management Agency.

“The expansion of the eligibility allows us to begin vaccinating more broadly over the next three weeks and open up the availability to more of our population that needs the vaccine; which will, in turn, allow us to begin opening up our county more widely,” Bittner said. “The task force registration will be slightly modified, with possible removal of some of the qualifying questions that are Phase 1A-specific; but we are working to more effectively streamline the process to get more shots into more arms as quickly as possible.”

The Fayette County COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force formed in January and, within just three weeks, had established its online registry system for county citizens seeking the vaccine.

“Between the partnerships we have made, including the federal programs and state allotment, we have vaccinated nearly 40,000 people - most of them being over the age of 65,” Bittner said. “Our task force-run clinics have vaccinated over 26,000 of those people over the last two months. All of those vaccinated self-reported being in the Phase 1A category.”

Moving forward, Bittner said, remaining citizens who wish to be vaccinated “can expect some variations” of how appointments are scheduled.

“Those changes may include an email asking you to call and schedule an appointment for a certain day when it’s your turn; or you may see an addition of an open phone line to call and schedule,” Bittner said. “More importantly, you may see additional vaccination sites popping up and being scheduled concurrently to get people vaccines that want them.”

Fayette County Commissioner Scott Dunn said the state expansion means “progress,” as the task force and its partner providers were working hard to schedule the Phase 1A population.

“The expansion to the next round will enlarge the pool of people with whom we can make appointments,” Dunn said. “It has been a remarkable experience to see people from health care,

government, nonprofits and volunteers work together to accomplish so much. It hasn't been perfect when it comes to getting 'shots in arms,' but we made it happen."

Commissioner Vince Vicites said the new eligibility guidelines are "good news" for Fayette County and all of Pennsylvania, because "we can keep our momentum going."

"By utilizing our centralized registry system, we can begin signing people up who fall under other categories, knowing that all Fayette County residents will be able to get vaccinated after April 19," Vicites said. "We're able to continue getting shots in arms without delay, so I encourage all citizens that want to be vaccinated to register as soon as they can."

Vicites said the task force has been "a great example of people working together for the good of Fayette County."

"There's nothing more important than people getting vaccinated and protected from this virus. I have no doubt that we'll reach 70 percent herd immunity for our county residents as soon as we can," he said. "If we can accomplish that, people can get back to doing the things they enjoy; so thank you to all our volunteers and partner providers, as well as our citizens for their patience and support."

Commissioner Chairman Dave Lohr said it's exciting that Fayette County has "come so far," despite the "long, arduous process" of rolling out the vaccine.

"We've had a great team working collaboratively to make the strides that we have, and anything that helps Fayette County return to a sense of normalcy is a good thing. People have become so COVID-weary that it makes it difficult to remain COVID-wary, and that's when people engage in foolish behaviors and we see numbers rise," Lohr said. "As a county, we've been committed to ensuring everyone who wants to receive a vaccine has access, and expanding eligibility is the next logical step forward toward getting back to life as we knew it pre-COVID."

Lohr attributed the vaccine registration process' success and efficiency to the task force's unbelievable progress.

"When this first started, our phones were ringing off the hook with people wanting to register; and we're still getting calls, but the volume has decreased significantly," he said. "It's really amazing. In my opinion, this is a shining example of collaboration at its best; with the task force including entities that run the gamut from public to private, for-profit to nonprofit, and everyone in between. We've all been working together toward the common goal of helping people get what they need. I thank everyone who has been involved in this monumental effort."

Pennsylvania's accelerated phased rollout kicked off March 31, with eligibility expanding to include all law enforcement; firefighters; grocery store employees; and food and agriculture workers.

Today, all residents in Phase 1B are eligible to start scheduling vaccination appointments. On April 12, all Phase 1C citizens will be eligible, followed by open registration for all residents becoming available April 19.

Muriel Nuttall, Executive Director of the Fayette Chamber of Commerce and Fayette County COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force co-lead added, "In an effort to assist our residents in scheduling the vaccine, the task force has established a phone number for direct scheduling. That phone number is 724-430-3900 and residents may call between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. When the call center is

closed, we encourage residents to go to [www.FayetteCountyPA.org](http://www.FayetteCountyPA.org) to complete an individual registration. Registrations will be sent to the call bank and calls will be returned within 72 hours.”

For more information about the Fayette County COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force or to register for vaccination, visit [www.FayetteCountyPA.org](http://www.FayetteCountyPA.org).

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