

Vaccinating Teachers

Sym Singh, Dir. of Leg. Affairs
Office of the Governor, State of South Carolina

Starting MONDAY FEBRUARY 8TH – South Carolina residents age 65 and older may start receiving COVID-19 vaccination shots.

There are just over 300,000 residents aged 65 thru 69 that will be eligible starting Monday.

We have a moral and ethical duty to save the lives of South Carolinians dying from COVID-19. The average age for COVID-19 deaths in South Carolina is 75.

The average age of a teacher in South Carolina is 42. Almost 88% of COVID-19 related deaths occur in those age 61 and older.

To place a younger person who is at dramatically less risk, between an older citizen and that potentially lifesaving shot, would be unconscionable and irresponsible.

Teachers are next in line for the vaccine. There are some teachers who are concerned about returning to work without being vaccinated. That is a legitimate concern.

It's important that every school district coordinate with local health care providers to ensure teachers can be vaccinated as quickly and efficiently as possible.

According to a recent survey conducted by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE):

- 37 school districts currently have a plan to vaccinate employees in coordinating with a local hospital or approved health care provider.
- 19 have communicated with local health care providers but have not formalized a plan.
- 25 indicated no plan or provided any evidence of creating such a plan.

In addition:

- Districts reported employing 122,876 educators and support staff this school year.
- Of which 57,307 are teachers.
- Districts project 58% or 32,265 teachers will take the vaccine.

Today, Governor McMaster directed school to finalize vaccination plans right away – and submit the plans to Superintendent Spearman and the Department of Education.

There must be a coordinated effort at the local level to facilitate the rollout.

If a district needs assistance, hospitals throughout are state are stepping up to collaborate and coordinate vaccination plans with individual districts.

It's critical that local health care providers know in advance how many teachers want the vaccine, to ensure the state has a sufficient supply of doses to begin vaccinating teachers.

In addition, Governor McMaster directed school districts not offering five day a week in person instruction - to submit plans to open and operate in person five days a week to Superintendent Spearman and the Department of Education for approval.

The state cannot begin vaccinating our teachers without information contained in both these plans. So, we must act quickly.

As of February 1, 2021, of the 79 traditional school districts in our state:

- 27 offered full face-to-face instruction serving 34% of all students in our state.
- 4 offered only remote learning serving 3% of students in our state; and
- 48 offered hybrid instruction serving 63% of all students in our state

Virtually every single private school has its doors open every day, as do 92% of our state's childcare centers.

School districts in our state have received over \$1.2 billion in COVID-19 relief from the federal government. They have all the PPE, testing equipment and resources they need to operate full-time.

Hundreds of thousands of people are going to work every day all across our state - safely.

Classrooms may be the safest place from the virus.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cites extensive data showing there is "little evidence that schools have contributed meaningfully to increased community transmission."

Research conducted by pediatricians at the Medical University of South Carolina found no surge in COVID-19 cases in Charleston County public schools following the return of in-person classes.

We know that students have lost significant learning progress out of the classroom. That must change. Quickly.