

Where is the COVID vaccine going?

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The Minnesota Department of Health continues to give updates on the news regarding the dissemination of COVID-19 vaccine, but some of you may be wondering, "What does that mean for Aitkin County?" as well as, "When can I get mine?"

MDH reviews the CDC guidelines for vaccine distribution and then creates a statewide plan specific to Minnesota. The Department of Health first allocated vaccine to those in *Phase 1a*: healthcare providers, long term care residents, emergency medical providers (whether EMS, first responders, or those that render care first on the scene of an accident or fire), congregate care providers and assisted living providers. More recently, they have allocated vaccine for daycare providers, school staff and individuals 65+ years old.

Some vaccine has been sent straight to healthcare facilities, as Riverwood received its first allocations for their staff. Some has been sent to pharmacies, such as CVS, who were contracted by the federal government to provide vaccination to long term care facilities. Some vaccine was sent to Local Public Health Departments, to ensure that those eligible and not provided for through hospitals or pharmacies were covered.

Under this directive, Aitkin County Public Health Nurses have been providing vaccination clinics to groups throughout Aitkin County. First, Public Health Staff contacted each organization to find out how many of their members were interested in being vaccinated. As vaccine is allocated and received a clinic site is set up and coordinated. Each organization is again contacted to inform them of the site and date and how members can register for an appointment time. Using this process, Public Health has immunized Aitkin County First Responders, Emergency Medical Services, Fire Departments, Search & Rescue and Law Enforcement personnel who respond to health emergencies, accidents and fires. They also provided vaccination to interested dental, eyecare, chiropractic, morticians and mental healthcare providers, as well as personal care attendants, essential service providers who assist in nursing facilities, adult foster care providers and other congregate care providers.

When MDH opened up to childcare providers, school staff, and those 65+, they allocated vaccine again to hospitals/clinics, pharmacies interested in assisting in providing vaccinations to the public, and public health, as well as implemented some pilot projects throughout Minnesota for dispensation to some of the individuals in those groups. Selected Aitkin County childcare and school staff that were offered this opportunity were contacted by MDH and directed to the pilot site located in Mountain Iron. Other sites for 65+ were opened up and registration was made available online, and later by random drawing of those registered. Aitkin County Public Health, Riverwood Healthcare Center, and GuidePoint Pharmacy have been working together to coordinate delivery of vaccine to target populations according to ability and allotments. Aitkin County Public Health was able to provide vaccinations to all school staff and childcare providers at the end of January and beginning of February, more recently, along

with Riverwood Healthcare and GuidePoint Pharmacy, they began serving individuals 65+. Over the course of the last 6 weeks, Public Health Nurses have delivered over 800 first doses and 300 2nd doses of COVID-19 vaccine at 51 clinics throughout the county. As more vaccine becomes available, Public Health, Riverwood, and GuidePoint will work together to ensure vaccination is more broadly available. Further information and registration opportunities will be further messaged at that time. As the Department of Health defines and determines eligibility for additional target groups, information will be provided via media outlet sources.

If you have any questions about vaccine, distribution, or providers, you can visit Minnesota's COVID-19 Response website: <https://mn.gov/covid19/vaccine/index.jsp> for more information. Also, MDH launched the **COVID-19 Vaccine Connector** so you can find out when, where, and how to get your vaccine when it is available for you. It's safe, secure, and free. Sign up at <https://mn.gov/covid19/vaccine/connector/>. Minnesotans who are unable to sign up online can call 833-431-2053 to sign up over the phone. Information is available in many languages – call the translation hotline at 833-431-2053 for assistance. For local information, you may **also** call Aitkin County Health & Human Services at 927-7200 or 1-800-328-3744 and ask for Public Health.