

## Chester County COVID-19 Vaccine Update - Webinar Transcript

January 5, 2021

**Bobby Kagel, County Administrator:** We will go ahead and get started in just another 60 seconds...

**Bobby Kagel:** Ok, good afternoon everybody. I'm Bobby Kagel, I'm the County Administrator. Welcome to the Chester County COVID-19 Vaccine webinar. We hope that this information will be useful. We know this is an extremely important topic and there is a lot of anxiety and a lot of interest around this topic and so we are pleased to have our Health Department Director, Jeanne Casner, here who will share what the county's plan is. But first, please allow me to introduce our three County Commissioners to provide some introductory remarks.

We will start with our Chair, Commissioner Marian Moskowitz.

**Commissioner Moskowitz:** Hi everybody. Thank you so much being here and Happy New Year! The Health Department has been working really tirelessly to give you the most up-to-date information on our vaccine program. We're all very tired of COVID and we've been dealing with a lot – and our community has done such a great job of adhering to the rules - and our numbers show it. We have a little bit more ways to go and there is light at the end of the tunnel, so I want to thank our Health Department for coordinating a great effort on the ground and we're here to help you and to help everybody get through this - so thank you!

**Bobby Kagel:** Thank you Commissioner. Next is our Vice-Chair, Commissioner Josh Maxwell.

**Commissioner Maxwell:** Thank you, Mr. Kagel. It is a joy to be with so many Chester County residents and I think we have something really important and exciting to share with everyone. Health Director Casner is going to talk about the incredible work that the Health Department has put in over the past 11 months, and I think you will all see how wonderful and appreciative we should be of having one of the top Health Departments in the area. We understand that for the next few months, our priority #1 is making sure that as many people have access to vaccinations as possible, and we've made it a priority to make sure that - geographically and financially – everyone in Chester County has access to a vaccination as we move through these stages. I agree with our Chair, Marian Moskowitz, in just saying that our Health Department is doing a fantastic job and I'm glad that they are here today to provide all of this information to our wonderful community and all of you that are joining us here today.

**Bobby Kagel:** Thank you, Commissioner. Last, but certainly not least, is Commissioner Michelle Kichline.

**Commissioner Kichline:** Thank you Bobby. Thank you everybody for tuning in. We believe this is an incredibly important forum that we're going to have this afternoon and we're very grateful that we have our own Health Department here in Chester County. There are only a few in the state that do, and I think as we roll out this vaccine, you will see the difference that having a Health Department in your own county is going to help to make this as seamless as possible. I think we're going to get some information this afternoon on what is actually going to be happening, what the different stages are,

and really how we're going to work tirelessly to make sure that our entire county has access to the vaccine and we can put this awful chapter behind us, and go out and open businesses and open schools and get on with life! So with that, I'll turn it over to our Health Director, Jeanne Casner.

**Health Director Jeanne Casner:** Good afternoon everyone. Thank you Commissioners and Bobby for having me join you this afternoon for such an important topic. It's my pleasure to be able to provide updates regarding the COVID-19 Vaccine in Chester County. I will also provide an update on COVID-19 testing at the end of this webinar.

I just want to say up front that much of what you hear will be relevant to Delaware County. As you know, we've been supporting Delaware County in their entire COVID response – so just be aware of that and I'll try to differentiate where we can.

We can all easily agree that 2020 was like no other year we have ever experienced. Today is quite a milestone to be able to share information about a vaccine nearly one year after we began tracking COVID-19 in our county.

Vaccine began arriving in Chester County as early as December 17 at our hospitals, and again on December 23 at the Health Department. Delaware County hospitals also have received vaccine in mid-December and County Officials there expect to receive their first shipment of vaccine sometime in January. The PA Department of Health has a very robust process for applying to be a vaccine provider, approving providers and ultimately ordering vaccine from the state.

The vaccine is a crucial public health strategy in our fight against COVID-19 – however, we must remember that the vaccine is not a cure...it is another tool in our fight and we must continue to practice the proven mitigation efforts of wearing a mask, washing our hands, ensuring we are physically separate from others, and importantly, avoiding gatherings. So, after you get your vaccine – if you choose to – you must still wear your mask and do all of the other actions we've been asking of you.

The vaccine's timing is quite good because we anticipate having to weather another surge from our recent holidays. And as you have likely heard, there are new strains of COVID-19 that have, or will soon reach the United States that are proving to spread quicker than the one we are currently battling.

Based on what we know now, the vaccines we are currently receiving in Chester County work against the original AND new strain of COVID-19, first identified in the United Kingdom. Further research on the effectiveness of the existing vaccine is being done on additional COVID-19 strains and variants that are being identified.

## **Data Update**

Before I get too much further into the vaccine plan, I want to give a quick update on data:

As of last Friday, our 7-day incident rate was 281 cases per 100,000 in Chester County. This is slightly lower than the previous 7 days.

Also, as of last Friday, our 7-day percent positivity was 10.99% in Chester County. This too is slightly lower than the previous 7 days.

The incidence rate and percent positivity are impacted by the activities we as individuals engage in that have increased exposure risks. **I cannot stress enough the importance of reducing your exposure by avoiding group activities**, remaining home when you're not feeling well for ANY reason, and wearing a mask at all times when you're not in your home.

For now, that is all I want to say about data, but I will remind you that more data is available on our website at [chesco.org/coronavirus](https://chesco.org/coronavirus).

## Vaccination Plan

The Chester County Health Department has been planning for wide-scale vaccine administration for quite a while. We have years of experience in planning for similar large events, including providing flu vaccine clinics throughout Chester County every year.

Our planning began before the PA Department of Health's plan was developed, and we have revised it based upon their plan and further guidance from the federal experts and vaccine manufacturer guidance.

As you can imagine, vaccinating a county as large as Chester County is no small undertaking! That is equally true for Delaware County.

As a Health Department, we play multiple roles with vaccine planning and distribution. First, we aim to coordinate and support others who are also providing the vaccination, such as our hospitals, health centers, urgent care centers, out-patient practices, and pharmacies and others, just to name a few. We are also administering vaccines ourselves.

Our success is heavily dependent upon having enough vaccinators throughout the county and having large quantities of the vaccine available so everyone who wishes to get vaccinated is able to.

Because our vaccine availability is limited currently, we are distributing them in a phased approach.

Beyond vaccine availability, the phases were established to also balance the prevention of more disease and deaths from COVID-19, and the preservation of societal functioning.

We anticipate that as more organizations begin vaccinating – such as our pharmacies and out-patient centers – and as more vaccine becomes available, we will be able to vaccinate across multiple phases.

## Phases

So, what are these phases? Let's go into a little bit more detail...

The phases are outlined on our website, and I encourage you to go look at our website - [chesco.org/coronavirus](https://chesco.org/coronavirus). **It is important to realize that the phases relate to anyone who LIVES or WORKS in Chester County.** The same phases are being used in Delaware County.

### Phase 1A

Phase 1A is comprised of a few groups that are most essential in sustaining our COVID-19 response and are likely to be exposed to, or treat people with COVID-19. So in this phase, think of individuals serving in our coroner's office, our medical examiner and our funeral staff.

You have all been hearing about healthcare personnel. These are both paid and unpaid personnel serving in health care settings who have the potential for direct or indirect exposure to patients or infectious materials.

There are a large number of healthcare professionals that are included in this - including, but not limited to, emergency medical service personnel, nurses, nursing assistants, physicians, technicians, therapists, phlebotomists, pharmacists....the list goes on to include clinical personnel in school settings, in our correctional facilities, contractual staff not employed by the health care facility, and let's not also forget all of the individuals such as clerical, dietary, environmental services, laundry, security, maintenance, etc. that are not directly involved in patient care in such facilities, but are potentially exposed to infectious agents that can be transmitted among healthcare personnel and patients.

Phase 1A also includes our Emergency Medical Service – or EMS – providers as well as our long term care residents and staff at long-term care facilities.

### Phase 1B

Phase 1B can be summarized as our critical workers, essential frontline workers and those who are 75 years old or older.

“Critical workers” and “essential frontline workers” include those who are essential to continue critical infrastructure and maintain the services and functions the County depends on daily, and workers who cannot perform their duties remotely and must work in close proximity to others.

So when we think about these groups – it's our first responders, like our firefighters and law enforcement. It's manufacturing, energy sector, food and agricultural processing, workers serving

people living in congregate care settings that aren't in Phase 1A. It's our transportation workers – including our school bus drivers. It's our education sector, our water and wastewater workers. Child care is included here – same as our home visiting staff.

It is a LONG list in Phase 1B, and I want to remind everybody when you are looking at our website, these are listed simply alphabetically – not by priority.

Also included in this group is our postal service and our residents who are 75 years and older.

## **Phase 1C**

Moving on to Phase 1C – it can really be summarized as an extension of our critical workers and essential frontline workers or an extension of Phase 1B. It also adds individuals between ages 65-74 and individuals age 16-64 with high-risk medical conditions.

So, here again, alphabetically:

- Construction Staff
- Energy Industry Staff
- Finance/Banking Staff
- Food Service Staff
- Information Technology and Communications Staff
- Legal Staff
- Media Staff

When we reference people with high risk medical conditions, we are particularly interested in those who have:

- Cancer
- Chronic kidney disease
- COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
- Weakened immune system
- Serious heart conditions, such as heart failure, coronary artery disease, or cardiomyopathies
- Sickle cell disease
- Type 2 Diabetes
- Women who are pregnant

Also in 1C are:

- Public Health Staff
- Public Safety Staff
- Small Business/Trade/Gig Economy Staff

- Utility Staff, etc.

You can see these groups are very large.

## **Phase 2**

Simply put...Phase 2 is all other people! It is any other individual age 16 and older that is not already recommended for vaccination in the prior phases.

Should vaccine become available for those younger than 16, those individuals will be accommodated as well.

So we have a very diverse set of groups in each phase, which means we have to have diverse communications and distribution approaches. Let me just walk you through, as an example, what that looks like in Phase 1A. We are currently in Phase 1A and actively vaccinating across the county through hospitals, health centers and the Health Department.

- So our EMS personnel – our hospitals and other health centers are vaccinating EMS personnel within their service area. Additionally, the Health Department is assisting with that for EMS who cannot get to those locations.
- Our healthcare personnel affiliated with a health system or a hospital are being vaccinated through the hospitals. The hospitals are receiving their vaccine directly from the PA Department of Health.
- Healthcare personnel not affiliated with a hospital or health system – they too will be vaccinated in partnership with hospitals and other health centers. In addition, the Health Department is also vaccinating these personnel.

As you can see, it definitely takes a team approach for those groups.

When we look at long term care personnel and residents, the state is leading in that – so the PA Department of Health has contracted with pharmacies to provide vaccine to staff and residents in skilled nursing facilities.

After the skilled nursing facilities, the state will continue to begin vaccination efforts for residents and staff in other long term care facilities.

And finally in Phase 1A - the coroner, medical examiner and funeral home staff who are being vaccinated by the Health Department.

A common question many of you may have is how is the phased COVID-19 vaccine availability going to be communicated to those who live and work in Chester County? Not only is this a common question, but it is an extremely important question!

You will know what phase is currently being vaccinated by visiting the Health Department's website at [chesco.org/health](https://chesco.org/health). On our home page, we identify which phase we are actively vaccinating, and which phase we are preparing for.

So, the next natural question then becomes...“How will I know when it is my turn to receive the vaccine?”

Here is where we will leverage any and all communication options available to us.

With each phase we will send communications through traditional media channels, social media, and of course, our website.

We will also use Chester County organizations who are best connected to groups within a phase to help with the communication. For example, we have already communicated to our mushroom farm workers and other agricultural organizations - not only directly through the farms, but also with the American Mushroom Institute and Chester County's Agricultural Development Council.

As another example, we will use our senior centers and Aging Services Department to assist with communications to our older populations who are NOT living in a care facility.

We are using a Vaccine Interest Survey – available through our website – to gauge how many people are interested in getting the vaccine from the groups within Phase 1A and 1B, and will collect your contact information so we can reach out to you when vaccine and appointments are available.

So I encourage you, if you are working in a healthcare setting and are not affiliated with a hospital, to please complete the HEALTHCARE Vaccine Interest Survey; or if you are in Phase 1B, please complete the Phase 1B Vaccine Interest Survey. Both surveys are located on the Health Department's home page at [chesco.org/health](https://chesco.org/health). Completing the survey expresses your interest. It **DOES NOT** register you for a vaccine or an appointment. You will receive a follow up communication that will provide information on making an appointment for your vaccination when vaccine and appointments are available.

I have to ask you for your patience once again, because we cannot predict how much vaccine the state will be sending to the Health Department on any given week. And therefore, we can only open up enough appointments for which we have vaccine. With each shipment we will **ABSOLUTELY** open up more vaccine appointments, and will communicate to individuals who have expressed interest.

It is very common for us to receive a phone call or an email from someone who completed our Vaccine Interest Survey asking if we received it and when will they hear back from it. If you did not receive an error – **trust us that we received it!** You do not have to call us. You can expect to hear back from us when more vaccine has been received and appointments are opened up.

While I do not have a definitive time for advancing into Phase 1B, we are eager to move into that phase once we confirm that Phase 1A is well enough underway, and we are not limited in our vaccine supply.

I am sure many of you are wondering where vaccination sites are located. Certainly you've heard about our hospitals and health centers - health centers are those such as ChesPenn in Coatesville, La Comunidad Hispana in Kennett Square, and Community Health and Dental in the Pottstown area. They are currently hosting at least one vaccination site each.

In addition to our hospitals and health centers, the Health Department is currently hosting one vaccination site at the Government Services Center located at 601 Westtown Road in West Chester. Due to our current vaccine availability, this is the only site we are currently hosting.

Ultimately, we will provide convenient vaccine locations throughout the county to everyone who lives and works in Chester County who wishes to get vaccinated. The same will be true in Delaware County.

With more vaccine, the Health Department will expand its vaccination sites to include large-scale vaccination clinics in the north, south, east, west and central regions of the county AND we will host smaller mobile and pop-up sites in other parts of the county.

As we expand our sites, we will also expand the hours to include evening hours and weekends.

My team is working through the final details for all of our vaccination sites. Some of the sites may include schools, banquet halls, senior centers, leased spaces and churches.

And of course as the weather improves, we will be able to host drive-through sites.

As the sites are finalized we will certainly post them on our website with dates and times of operation and will also work with community organizations throughout the county to get the information out about locations, dates and times.

## **What to Expect at a Vaccination Site**

I want to give you a sense of what to expect when you get vaccinated at a Health Department site.

When you sign up for an appointment, you will give us some registration information. At the site, we will review and confirm all of that information to include the important screening questions

If your group is required to provide proof that you work in a priority group, we will also review that.

You will get your vaccine and spend 15 minutes after the vaccine in an observation room to ensure you do not have any reaction to the vaccine.

Finally, you will receive your appointment for your second vaccine dose prior to leaving the site. This is critically important information about your vaccine – the date and which vaccine – will be provided to you on a card. You should retain that card and bring it back when you return for your second appointment to get your second dose.

We are well prepared and eager to vaccinate ANYONE who wishes to be vaccinated and **we STRONGLY encourage you to consider vaccination.**

Bottom line: as we receive the vaccines, we have a plan for administering those vaccines whether it be at a large scale clinic or mobile pop up clinic throughout the county and to do so as quickly as we can.

Let me try to cover some answers to several questions we have been receiving:

**Does the vaccine cost anything?**

No, there is no cost to the vaccine – either dose.

**Do I have to have health insurance to receive the vaccine?**

No, health insurance is not required for either dose.

**Will I receive a reminder notice for my 2nd vaccine dose?**

Yes, it may be in the form of an email or a text.

**I received information from the Health Department about getting an appointment but none are available. What should I do?**

Appointments are filling very quickly! I encourage you to continue to check back for more appointments as they are opened up with each shipment of vaccine that is received.

**I work in “X” industry and have been deemed “essential”, do I qualify to receive the vaccine?**

If your industry is listed in Phases 1A, 1B or 1C, the simple answer is yes. If you are unsure, you can certainly contact us at 610-344-6225 or [cchd@chesco.org](mailto:cchd@chesco.org).

**I’ve had COVID-19 already, can I still get vaccinated?**

Yes, COVID-19 vaccination will be offered to individuals who have already had COVID-19 infection. Anyone currently infected with COVID-19 should wait to get vaccinated until after their isolation period has finished AND their illness has resolved. Individuals who already had COVID-19 are somewhat protected already and could wait up to 90 days to get the vaccine after diagnosis.

**I have “X” medical condition, am I eligible for the vaccine?**

First and foremost, please consult with your doctor. If any of medical conditions that I listed before fit your scenario, have that discussion with your doctor – they will give you the appropriate guidance. If not, feel free to reach out to the Health Department through the email or phone number I gave earlier.

**I am 60-74 years old and have an existing medical condition, can I be bumped up in the priority for getting a vaccine?**

At this time, we cannot “bump” people or groups. The priority groups are consistent with the state and federal guidance and it is our responsibility as a Health Department to remain true to the guidance as stewards of this free vaccine.

**If I have questions about the vaccine, or how to get the vaccine, who do I contact?**

First, again, contact your doctor. We as the Health Department are another resource and that phone number is 610-344-6225, and the email again is [cchd@chesco.org](mailto:cchd@chesco.org).

**I’m a caregiver for my elderly parents. Can I get vaccinated earlier?**

Again, unfortunately at this time, we cannot bump groups or individuals into earlier groups. (Subsequent to the webinar, the following information was provided: In accordance with federal and state guidelines, priority will be given to the individuals at increased risk for severe illness from the COVID virus. Caregivers not employed by a healthcare agency, and therefore likely not seeing multiple patients and posing a lower risk of COVID transmission, will be eligible to receive the vaccine in phase 2.)

**I live in Delaware County, is the vaccine plan the same?**

As I alluded to, and you all know - we are providing guidance to Delaware County’s plan. It will be the same in some respects and similar in others. Clearly, we are two different counties but we are using the same priority groups in the same order – we’re using the same vaccine, same processes, same systems, but we won’t obviously be at the same sites. Delaware County is awaiting its first shipment of vaccine to open up its own vaccine sites. The county anticipates its first shipment soon and will also post information on those sites (dates, times) when it becomes available.

**Who is responsible for vaccinating me if I live and work in two different counties?**

Individuals who live and work in Chester County can receive vaccine in Chester County. Additionally through a reciprocal agreement with other southeastern counties, individuals can get the vaccine in the county of their employment. So you can go to where you work or where you live and get your vaccine.

This next question is a question I love getting!

**I am a retired doctor or nurse. How can I help in your vaccination efforts?**

First thank you for offering to assist! I encourage you to sign up for the Medical Reserve Corp, or MRC. You can find that on the home page of our website Please visit our website at

[chesco.org/health](https://chesco.org/health) and it will lead you to the MRC page where you can sign up and get additional information.

I think the ultimate question is when exactly will vaccine be available to anyone who wants it?!

I would love nothing better than to be able to give an exact date. It truly depends on how quickly Chester County receives the vaccine doses – whether it be through our hospitals, health centers, urgent care centers, out-patient practices, pharmacies AND the Chester County Health Department. Collectively, we need to receive those vaccine doses to expand who is vaccinating and where the vaccinations are occurring.

As a Health Department, we will continue to apply for the maximum number of doses possible when ordering vaccine from the PA Department of Health.

What I can tell you is that by March our goal is to ensure that 80% of eligible individuals who are being vaccinated in the phase we are in, will have access to receiving the COVID-19 vaccine within 15 minutes of their municipality or place of employment, at least 5 days a week.

And ultimately, that everyone who lives and works in Chester County who wishes to receive the vaccine, will be able to do so.

We aim to achieve this through working with all the COVID-19 vaccine providers in the County, AND establishing the large-scale and mobile vaccine clinics throughout Chester County.

## Testing Update

Let me cover a little bit about testing and provide an update before we end. I know we have shared a lot about our vaccine plan, but we are still conducting COVID-19 testing and the effort remains strong.

As you know, testing continues to be an important public health strategy, and it will be for quite some time. For many months we have been striving to meet the demand of testing by ensuring people are aware of testing sites, and by hosting some testing sites as a Health Department.

As a Health Department, we remain focused on testing individuals who are **symptomatic** or who **have been exposed to COVID-19**. We have two additional sites that we now host: one at Springton Manor Park in Glenmore and another at Nottingham Park in Nottingham. We are seeking to continue to expand to more sites, while continuing our testing that is currently going on at the Government Services Center.

We also switched our scheduling tool which reduced our cancellation and no-show rate from 25%-30% down to 10% which means we are able to accommodate more appointments with a real-time schedule.

We have also updated our website to include a COVID Self Checker to assist people in determining if they need to be tested, and, importantly, an interactive map to show where more testing options have become available throughout the County through other providers. The Health Department is ONE option for testing – there are many others.

I know this has been a lot of information so I thank you for giving your time to join us today.

As a reminder, COVID-19 vaccine information and updates can be found at [chesco.org/health](https://chesco.org/health), and if you have any further questions, please contact us at 610-344-6225 or [cchd@chesco.org](mailto:cchd@chesco.org).

I hope this has been informative and helpful to all of you and I wish each and everyone one of you a healthy and peaceful 2021!

Thank you Commissioners, and I'll turn it over to Bobby,

**Bobby Kagel:** Thanks Jeanne for the information. We know that there are a lot of questions that have been pouring in about specifics about the plan. Please know, as Jeanne said, a lot of the specific questions about eligibility and handling different situations are best handled by calling our Call Center at 610-344-6225 – or even better, sending an email to [cchd@chesco.org](mailto:cchd@chesco.org). Sending the email will likely get you a faster response so we are not overwhelming the phone lines. I really encourage you to reach out to the Health Department with your specific questions – we will be happy to answer them.

I want to remind everyone that this webinar was recorded and will be available shortly on our website, [chesco.org](https://chesco.org). We are also preparing a transcript and the transcript will be translated into Spanish as well as having a voiceover done on the webinar in Spanish so we can share it with our Spanish speaking population.

Jeanne, we really appreciate all of your time, and the Commissioners. Thanks to all of you for jumping on and hearing about our plan.

That concludes our webinar. Thank you everybody.