

With the Phase 2 Vaccine Plan in the Offing, Regional Coordinators Say they're Ready to Go

The appointed Covid-19 vaccine regional coordinators told Crain's they are ready to meet Gov. Andrew's Cuomo task of submitting a distribution plan for phase two by the first week of January, having had experience with other large-scale vaccination efforts.

The governor named the Greater New York Hospital Association as the regional hub for the city, Northwell Health for Long Island and Westchester Medical Center for the mid-Hudson region in his Wednesday briefing. The hubs are tasked with creating a regional distribution plan that would be reviewed and approved by the state, with implementation as soon as late January, Cuomo said.

"It will be handled by medical professionals. There will be no political favoritism," he said.

"Turning in a plan by the first week of January is a short time frame, but we have experience in this," said Mary Mahoney, vice president of emergency management and clinical preparedness at Northwell Health. Northwell had assisted in vaccination and treatment efforts during the H1N1 pandemic in 2009, and lessons learned then could be adapted for Covid-19, she said.

There are, however, new challenges posed by the current pandemic. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are new, and patients are required to be observed for 20 minutes after administration, which limits how many patients a medical professional can vaccinate in a given time, Mahoney said. There are also additional requirements for distancing and vaccine preparation, and these logistical challenges will need to be accounted for as coordinators put together their plan.

Regional hubs are also expected to work with local governments and organizations to overcome vaccine hesitancy, Cuomo said in his briefing. Many health systems, including Northwell, already have built relationships around testing during the pandemic, and those can be leveraged for vaccination efforts too, Mahoney said.

Northwell's team is expected to be assembled next week, Mahoney said. "There are a lot of people anxious to get the vaccine, and we want to be ready come late January," she said.

Eric Linzer, president and CEO of the New York Health Plan Association, said that insurance plans have always played an important role in vaccination efforts and are ready to help.

"Our members stand ready to work with Gov. Cuomo and his administration, local public health authorities and our partners in the delivery system to get New Yorkers vaccinated," he said.