MEDIA RELEASE

San Juan County

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 24, 2020

UPDATE on Vaccination Distribution in San Juan County

San Juan County Department of Health and Community Services has just received a shipment of six hundred doses of the recently approved Moderna COVID vaccine from the Washington State Department of Health (DOH). Department staff are actively completing the recently released vaccine specific training, and these doses will be used to support efforts to immunize residents in the Phase 1a category.

Focus will be on high-risk first responders, high-risk workers in healthcare settings, and long-term care residents and staff. More detailed information on the Phase 1a category from the Washington DOH may be found here.

As the Moderna vaccine requires two shots, this initial supply will be used to vaccinate three-hundred individuals in the Phase 1a category, though that number will rise as additional vaccine is secured.

While local healthcare providers and pharmacies will be the primary means for islanders to receive their vaccine in the months to come, this initial delivery to San Juan County will enable a timely jump-start to the overall effort for those residents who fall into the Phase 1a category.

Additional details:

-San Juan County Health & Community Services is working closely with local Emergency Medical Services (EMS) agencies to ensure vaccination of their staff and volunteers, and to coordinate EMS support to vaccine delivery efforts.

-University of Washington Medicine (operator of clinics on Lopez and Orcas) and PeaceHealth (operator of Peace Island Medical Center on San Juan Island) have received doses of vaccine at the regional level, however, as of December 24th, those supplies have yet to be distributed to their island medical facilities in order to vaccinate their staff. San Juan County Health & Community Services is coordinating closely with these organizations and monitoring their potential need for support.

-Long-term care facilities in the islands have been included in a national plan to distribute vaccine through mainland pharmacy chains (Walgreens and CVS). The exact timing of delivery is unknown. San Juan County Health & Community Services is coordinating closely with local long-term care facilities and monitoring their potential need for support.

-There are a number of high-risk workers employed in healthcare settings in San Juan County that are not affiliated with larger organizations, or who work for healthcare employers not planning on distributing vaccine to their staff. San Juan County Health & Community Services is actively reaching out to those providers and individuals, and will continue to do so over the next week to ensure that they are included in vaccine delivery efforts. Those eligible may include physical or occupational therapists, hospice workers, home health care providers, dental providers, mental health crisis response staff, or others working in healthcare settings with direct patient contact.

-Additional San Juan County healthcare providers and pharmacies are currently or may in the future be approved by Washington DOH to administer the vaccine. San Juan County is coordinating with approved delivery partners to explore all possible means of expediting delivery to Phase 1a eligible individuals in San Juan County, including the potential sharing of vaccine supplies.

Important information:

-San Juan County Health & Community Services understands there is tremendous demand for the vaccine from those who may not be included in Phase 1a. Please know that though every effort will be made to distribute vaccine rapidly and equitably, patience and empathy will get us through this. Timing, volume, and eligibility requirements are all outside of San Juan County control. The Health & Community Services team will continue to advocate on the islands' behalf and plan for a robust and rapid distribution as soon as doses arrive.

-Managing of our collective expectations is critical. Administration of vaccine will not be instantaneous. There will be shortfalls and delays in vaccine delivery to the islands. It will be many months until the supply necessary to vaccinate all island residents will be available. Even those individuals who are especially vulnerable to the disease may need to wait some time until immunizations are possible.

-Current WA DOH estimates are that there will be enough vaccine in WA by early February to vaccinate approximately 7% of WA residents. The details of this forecast will change with time, but it is a useful number to help set expectations.

-It is important to understand that though the Moderna vaccine is thought to be 94% effective (average flu vaccine is 40-60% effective), this means that 1 in 20 who receive the COVID vaccine are not protected. In addition, full protection is not achieved until fourteen days after the second dose, as the body needs time to develop maximum protection against the virus.

-As vaccine delivery ramps up, the islands need to maintain existing safety practices. Masking. Hygiene. Avoiding travel. Eliminating indoor social contacts. Ensuring that those who engage in higher-risk activities quarantine after doing so. Until the disease is truly under control, the risk of transmission remains, even from those who have been vaccinated. See this FAQ for more details.



San Juan County Health & Community Services Department staff opening the first shipment of COVID vaccine to arrive in the islands.