



Vaccination of Veterinary Personnel Against COVID-19 House of Delegates 2021 Winter Meeting

When might veterinarians expect to be offered the opportunity to be vaccinated?

Access to COVID-19 vaccines is determined at the state, territorial, and local levels, so the answer varies by location.

The CDC's [Vaccination Program Interim Playbook for Jurisdiction Operations](#), issued in September 2020, was developed as an interim guide for state, territorial, and local public health programs and their partners as they plan and operationalize a vaccination response to COVID-19 within their jurisdictions. It identified three phases for vaccine distribution and advised that "critical infrastructure workers" should have access to vaccine in Phase 1, following distribution to healthcare workers. In this document, Phase 1-b included people who play key roles in keeping essential functions of society running and cannot socially distance in the workplace, and those who are at high risk for severe COVID-19 illness. The playbook notes that the identification of critical infrastructure workers varies by jurisdiction. Based on the descriptions and sample worksheet provided in the playbook, AVMA believed that veterinary personnel would be accommodated in Phase 1-b.

Demand for COVID-19 vaccines is expected to exceed supply during the first months of the national COVID-19 vaccination program and, on December 20, 2020, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) [updated its vaccine allocation recommendations](#). The ACIP indicated that in Phase 1-b, COVID-19 vaccination should be offered to people 75 years and older and to "non-health care frontline essential workers," and in Phase 1-c to those 65-74 years old, those 16-64 with high-risk medical conditions, and any essential workers not included in Phase 1-b. During its deliberations, the ACIP considered scientific evidence regarding COVID-19 epidemiology, ethical principles, and vaccination program implementation considerations. ACIP's recommendations for COVID-19 vaccine allocation are interim and may be updated based on changes in conditions of FDA Emergency Use Authorization (EUA), FDA authorization for new COVID-19 vaccines, changes in vaccine supply, or changes in COVID-19 epidemiology.

In making its recommendations, the ACIP used the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) [guidance](#) to identify "essential critical infrastructure workers," and included reference to "food and agricultural workers" in its classification of "non-health care frontline essential workers." The CISA's 4.0 guidance includes "*those employed in veterinary health (including those involved in supporting emergency veterinary or livestock services); raising, caring for and management of animals for food, as well as pets;*" within its description of "food and agriculture essential critical infrastructure workers." Accordingly, the AVMA continues to believe that veterinarians are intended to be included in Phase 1-b of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout. However, given the large number of individuals identified as "essential critical infrastructure workers" by the CISA, it would not be

surprising for some jurisdictions to decide that veterinarians will be accommodated in Phase 1-c or Phase 2. Other states are simply taking a different approach than that suggested by the federal agencies and may also have more or fewer phases in their plans.

Veterinary personnel may qualify for earlier access to vaccination if their personal situation puts them at greater risk. For example, people 75 or older and individuals with certain comorbidities that put them at risk of severe illness from COVID-19 may be identified as earlier recipients in some states or localities. When seeking vaccination, veterinarians and their team members should consult with their healthcare providers regarding their potential risk for contracting COVID-19 and any special considerations (e.g., allergies to vaccine components, pregnancy, lactation) regarding receipt of the vaccine.

The AVMA has advocated actively and successfully at the federal level for veterinary personnel to be considered a priority group for vaccination. In addition, the AVMA has been working diligently with state veterinary medical associations to monitor vaccine rollout plans and continue advocating for appropriate access by veterinarians and their teams.

What is happening in states right now?

AVMA recently surveyed state veterinary medical associations and, as of January 6, 2021, had received responses from 35 states. Of those states, three indicated they were told veterinary personnel would be given access during Phase 1-a, nine during 1-b, two during 1-c, two during Phase 2, and one during Phase 3. Eighteen states shared that they had not been provided with information as to when veterinarians might expect to be accommodated. In some states, as vaccine supplies have been determined to be less than anticipated and in response to the revised ACIP recommendations, veterinary personnel have been moved further down the list of recipients.

Preparing your practice and team

Vaccination is critical in the fight against COVID-19. As veterinary practices continue to provide needed healthcare services for patients, it is important for all team members to get vaccinated as early as possible. Vaccination is the best way for us to protect human health – of both team members and clients – as we continue to see patients and work within our communities. Because need and approach to decision-making vary by state, veterinarians should work with their state veterinary medical association to determine how they might most appropriately support prioritized access for veterinary personnel.

As trusted and respected professionals, veterinarians also set an example by getting vaccinated and telling others why they are doing so. Even before vaccination becomes widely available, veterinarians and their teams can lay the groundwork to encourage vaccine acceptance.

Additional information, including access to an FAQ document, is available within the AVMA's COVID-19 web center, here: www.avma.org/covidvaccine.