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w/photos

North Country Responds: Regional COVID19 Update 1/29/21

What happened last week:

The North Country Health Consortium (NCHC), the North Country's Regional Public Health Network, is committed to providing the community with regular updates on COVID-19 response in the North Country.

As Phase 1B got underway, current vaccine clinic locations for Coos and Northern Grafton Counties were announced and include: The former Brown School in Berlin operated by Androscoggin Valley Hospital, Upper Connecticut Valley Hospital in Colebrook, Weeks Medical Center sites in Lancaster and Whitefield, and Littleton Regional Healthcare. The State has opted to close the part-time fixed site operated by the NH National Guard at the Littleton Armory in Littleton in favor of allocating those vaccine doses to the public clinics being administered by the regional hospitals, providing better geographic distribution of the vaccine in our region. This week the North Country Public Health Network team began to lay the groundwork to ensure that North Country seniors have easy access to the vaccine. Talks with senior housing facility administrators are underway to coordinate mobile clinic teams' access to housing units in Littleton, Bethlehem, Colebrook, Northumberland/Groveton, and Berlin, so older adult residents can get vaccinated where they live rather than having to drive to a regional clinic location.

EMS teams across the region continued to operate clinics as they near the finish of 1A vaccinations for high-risk health workers and first responders. These clinics are providing first and second dose vaccinations to this tier of vaccine recipients through the end of January. As part of Phase 1B, the Public Health Network also held a clinic partnered with Northern NH Correctional Facility. For this effort, NCHC deployed four local Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) volunteers to help operate the clinic to vaccinate high-risk Corrections Officers.

What you need to know:

Everyone involved in the roll-out of vaccines to individuals in Tier 1b appreciates your patience! The process of opening registration through vaccines.nh.gov and 2-1-1 (the alternative to registering online at vaccines.nh.gov, and option for residents without access to the internet) is new and public interest was better than anticipated. The high volume of calls and registration submissions highlighted some challenges, and there has been continued development and collaboration between State and local resources to fine-tune processes to register and notify people eligible for vaccinations in Tier 1b. Call center representatives have been fielding calls by the thousands, resulting in longer than normal wait times. Consumers are asked to continue using these two registration access points to sign up for and ask questions about vaccine appointments.

Vaccine allocation into the state from one week to the next also continues to be the limiting factor for the number of vaccine appointments available at sites operated by the Regional Public Health Network and hospital partners. Doses are distributed around the state based on population, and the North Country continues to receive a proportional share that is fair and equitable compared to other public health regions, but the amount of doses to be shared across the state each week remains limited at this time. Until larger quantities of vaccine can be received for the state, available appointments across North Country clinics will also be limited.

NCHC's Regional Public Health Network has opened a North Country COVID Response phone line where members of the public can request additional information about local operations. North Country residents can call and leave a message with general questions and concerns during normal business hours, Monday through Friday, 8:00 am – 4:30 pm. Callers will receive a call back within one business day. Please note that the line is not for emergencies or vaccine appointment registration. The number to reach the North Country COVID Response Line is: (603)259-4369.

Shoutout to partners:

NCHC would like to recognize Berlin Superintendent of SAU3, Julie King. Superintendent King is a regular participant in COVID Response discussions in the Androscoggin Valley, and suggested the former Brown School as a viable clinic site to the Androscoggin Valley COVID Response team during site tours for potential clinic locations. Her quick insight offered a solution to providing a



clinic location in the Berlin-Gorham area, where the first Phase 1B vaccine clinics took place on January 28 and 29.

The North Country Health Consortium (NCHC) is a non-profit public health organization based in Littleton that collaborates with health and human services providers serving northern New Hampshire. Please direct any questions regarding the regional response to COVID-19 to COVID19@NCHCNH.org. To reach the North Country COVID Response line for general inquiries, call (603)259-4369 during business hours, M-F from 8 am – 4:30 pm.

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CAPTION: Thanks to the quick insight and suggestion of SAU3 Superintendent, Julie King, the former Brown School offers a regional site in the Berlin-Gorham area for public COVID-19 vaccine clinics. Pictured is the AV COVID Response team, including Superintendent King, touring the potential site before the clinic opened on January 28 and 29 this week for the roll out of Phase 1B vaccine distribution in the North Country.



CAPTION: This week, the crew at Gorham Fire & EMS, including (left to right) Heather Gagnon, Hannah Gagnon, Elissa Gramling, and Mathew Dustin, continued Phase 1A COVID vaccinations, while kicking off Phase 1B vaccine clinics on January 27.