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North Country Responds: Regional COVID19 Update 02/05/21

The North Country Health Consortium (NCHC), as 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.

What happened last week:

To occur along with the rollout of Phase 1B, the State of NH had announced a process for the State's 10% Equity Allocation. The Equity Allocation sets aside a portion of available vaccine supply at the State level for deployment in areas disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. The Unified Command staff for the North Country COVID Response has outlined and approved the strategy to provide mobile COVID-19 vaccine clinics to vulnerable populations throughout the region following the State of New Hampshire's Equity Allocation guidelines. The intent is to increase vaccine access to those vulnerable populations effected, including racial and ethnic minorities, people who are in 1B with significant limitations to access, homeless, those with no medical home, no transportation, language limitations, or are homebound.

The identification of people to receive the equity allotment, and how the of vaccines will be shared with these groups, is the work of the 13 Public Health Networks (PHN) across the State, including the North Country PHN. With attention to the region's geography, challenging winter travel conditions, and the fact that the North Country has the State's oldest population, the North Country PHN's Unified Command reserved the region's share of the State's Equity Allocation to residential facilities serving seniors, individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities, and those who are homeless. Working with local hospital, municipal, and housing authority partners, the Public Health Network will begin bringing mobile vaccine clinics to these residential settings beginning mid-February to eliminate the online registration process and transportation barriers involved in accessing community-based point of distribution (POD) vaccination clinics.



Looking ahead to future vaccination phases in the Spring, the Public Health Network has been able to purchase two heavy duty drive-thru tents, thanks to grant funding from the Department of Health and Human Resources. “We wanted to have the capacity to support the North Country's efforts by providing outdoor COVID-19 vaccination clinics,” said Jim Richardson, Public Health Emergency Preparedness Coordinator at the North Country Health Consortium (NCHC). “These tents can be rapidly deployed and provide relief from the weather for both vaccine recipients and staff conducting the clinics. According to CDC guidance, drive-thru clinics are recommended to minimize interaction, allowing vaccine recipients to stay in their vehicles for the entire vaccine process,” says Richardson.

What you need to know:

After getting vaccinated, it will take time before the vaccine begins to provide the most protection. The two currently authorized COVID-19 vaccines in use require 2 doses. According to the CDC, it typically takes a few weeks after receiving both doses for the body to produce a protective immune response. So, it is possible to get infected with the COVID-19 virus just before or just after getting vaccinated and then get sick because the vaccine did not have enough time to provide protection. Additionally, we do not yet know whether getting a COVID-19 vaccine will prevent you from spreading the virus to others, even if you do not get sick yourself. Experts are still evaluating the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide in real-world conditions.

It will take several months to go through the phases of distribution, allowing more people to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. Until a large portion of the public is protected through vaccination, we need to use all available tools to help stop the spread of COVID-19. It remains important to adhere to the COVID-safe routine, even after getting vaccinated: continue masking, stay 6 feet from others, avoid crowds, and wash hands often.

Shoutout to partners:

NCHC would like to recognize the efforts of partner Ben Gaetjens-Oleson and the Town of Lancaster. As Lancaster's Emergency Management Director, Ben is a member of the Public Health Network's Unified Command staff. In addition to heading up the PHN's 1A vaccine clinics conducted by Lancaster Fire & EMS, Ben has taken on the task of coordinating mobile clinics for senior residential facilities in Lancaster as part of the PHN's efforts at distributing the North Country region's share of the State's Equity Allocation for COVID-19 vaccines.

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: Looking ahead to Spring for providing outdoor vaccine clinics to the public in later phases (as recommended by the CDC in order to minimize interaction between clinic staff and vaccine recipients) the North Country Public Health Network, a program of the North Country Health Consortium, was able to purchase two heavy duty drive-thru tents, thanks to grant funding from the Department of Health and Human Resources. For more information about the North Country COVID Response, check out the website at NCHCNH.org.