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North Country Responds: Regional COVID19 Update 02/26/21

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:

It takes a village...

No one knows a community better than its residents, and that is exactly why the North Country Public Health Network's Unified Command staff convened a meeting this week that brought representatives from across the region representing School Administrative Units (SAU's), municipalities, emergency services, hospitals, and public health to the planning table.

The State anticipates an April 1st start to the vaccine roll-out for Tier 2A which includes staff working in schools serving children K-12; childcare, Head Start, and Early Head Start programs; and youth recreational camps. If the staff member works in New Hampshire and is in this group, they are eligible for the vaccine. The next step will be Phase 2B, which aims to vaccinate NH residents ages 50 – 64.

The purpose of the North Country Public Health Network's meeting was for the group to begin development of a strategy to provide vaccines for their K-12 school staff, including bus drivers, custodians, and cafeteria workers. The Public Health Network is facilitating a process to request vaccines and register vaccine recipients across North Country school districts, in a way that works best for each SAU. Some school districts will coordinate vaccine for their staff in school, while others will leverage existing high-throughput vaccination sites operated by hospital, Fire/EMS and health center partners in the region. In the coming weeks, school districts will begin to poll



their staff to identify the total number of potential vaccine recipients in order to inform planning efforts moving forward.

In the North Country this week, regional mobile clinics continued to provide 2nd dose vaccines for Tier 1A high-risk healthcare workers and congregate care residents at an assisted living facility and nursing home in Grafton County, while Gorham Fire & EMS and Lancaster EMS held clinics to administer 2nd dose shots for first responders. Tier 1B clinics this week included vaccinations for residents of the Berlin Housing Authority and Grafton County age-restricted housing units for seniors 65 and older, as well as planning sessions to deliver 2nd doses for corrections officers at the Northern NH House of Corrections in Berlin and 1st doses to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities living in residential settings around the region.

Nineteen Northern NH Unit Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) volunteers were deployed to cover 22 mobile clinic shifts with roles as vaccinators, COVID screeners, registration support, post-vaccination observers, materials managers, and more this week.

To date, PHN regional mobile clinics have provided 3,700 total vaccinations in the North Country and have completed vaccination clinics for Tier 1A eligible recipients.

What you need to know:

For many in the region, especially senior citizens, transportation is a challenge that carries over to accessing a COVID vaccine. Through the Tri-County Community Action Program (TCCAP), any seniors residing in Coos, Grafton, and Carroll Counties can schedule a free ride to a vaccine appointment at any hospital or clinic, including sites outside of their local health care provider. If you are a senior who needs a ride to get your COVID shot, or are helping a senior access transportation, call: (603)752-1741 to schedule a ride through TCCAP.

As many are aware, the Governor issued an Emergency Order requiring all New Hampshire schools K-12 to be at least hybrid by March 8. SAUs across the North Country have adopted various hybrid learning models that have allowed them to have students learning through in person and hybrid models since the beginning of the school year. Administrators, educators and school health staff have spent a great deal of time throughout the school year sharing their plans



and collaborating on topics like bussing policies, safe planning of athletic events and the monitoring of community spread rates to keep North Country students in person as often as possible.

Shoutout to partners:

Public Health Network partners, Chief Jay Watkins of the Berlin Fire Department, Chief Phil Cloutier of the Gorham Fire Department, and Mary Jo Landry, Executive Director of Berlin Housing Authority (BHA) get our partner shoutout this week! Their collaboration providing clinics to residents served by BHA truly exemplify the North Country way of taking care of one another and that the vaccine effort does, in fact, take a village.

“We have the best of both worlds with our Gorham and Berlin Fire Chief working closely together,” praised Landry as she spoke about the vaccinations for her tenants that took place in the past two weeks. Over the course of a single day, the mobile clinic with Chief Watkins serving as vaccinator, covered seven buildings within the City, going door-to-door in each building to provide first-dose vaccinations to seniors in their own apartments. “And the nurses! I think our tenants loved the nurses as much as having the convenience of having the shot delivered to them at their home,” said Landry of the volunteer nursing students from White Mountains Community College (WMCC) who were there to provide 15 minutes of post-vaccine observation to the grateful seniors. At another BHA clinic the previous week, Berlin High School student volunteers sat with vaccine recipients for the observation period “and our tenants had a ball with their 15 minutes,” said Landry.

Chief Watkins also noted, “A big take away from this was that the residents of all locations were very happy we were able to go to them. Some have not left their facilities for nearly a year and were uncomfortable trying to get out to a vaccine location.” Watkins went on to offer his thanks to Gorham Fire & EMS, Berlin High School, and White Mountains Community College for their partnership in the effort.

“Everyone was organized,” Landry said. “I am looking forward to the next clinics.”

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

North Country Responds COVID-19



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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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As part of the North Country COVID Response effort, Mary Jo Landry, Executive Director of the Berlin Housing Authority (BHA) collaborated with the Berlin and Gorham Fire Departments, lead by Chief Jay Watkins and Chief Phil Cloutier, respectively, to bring COVID vaccinations door-to-door to tenants served by BHA. BHA tenants, some of whom have not left their facilities for nearly a year, were all grateful to receive their first vaccine doses. For more information about the COVID Response in the North Country, go to NCHCNH.org.