
Letter: Vaccinations are just getting started

January 4, 2021

We have been getting a lot of calls about vaccines for COVID in Del Norte. We think it would be good to give a brief update. Like all the counties in California, we are gearing up, and are tackling the problem of vaccinating the groups of people that need to get vaccinated first. Our main goal is to get vaccine coverage for seniors in assisted living and skilled nursing, as well as the staff taking care of them. The other priority was to start vaccinating staff at Sutter Coast, who have direct patient contact.

As with all new programs, there are some technical details that need to be worked out, but we have a way to access cold storage of our allocation, and we will have facilitated about 140 vaccinations by the end of today, mostly at Sutter Coast and Crescent City Skilled Nursing. We have already started moving down the list a bit, for those groups that are able to vaccinate their staff easily, including EMTs and paramedics, for example. This will be our focus for the next two weeks at least, and we have to start planning their follow up doses as well.

More vaccine is on the way, but not very much yet. We don't know future allocations but we think that there will be enough of our current projected tally (about 600 doses of both Pfizer and Moderna combined) to vaccinate many health care workers at the hospital, seniors in congregate living, staff taking care of seniors, many of our medical clinics in town, EMTs and first responders and potentially medical staff at the jail as well as some law enforcement personnel. The interest in the vaccine is increasing, but there has been some skepticism, and we did not think that it made sense to wait until everyone in the highest tier group who was still "on the fence" about it had made up their minds. We also have encouraged everyone in this first vaccine rollout to not attempt to vaccinate everyone all at once, until we have direct experience with vaccine side effects.

If you look at that list, you can see that our local focus is on medical personnel, and the persons who might be called to assist those in need of medical care from COVID, as well as the very highest risk of the high-risk group, our elders. There will be more vaccines to come, and we will keep moving down the list, and sometimes up the list, to groups that are not able to "take care of their own", so to speak. We are going to be creating some vaccine teams this next month to start reaching other vulnerable groups,

and we hope to be able to draw on the assistance of medical offices to reach our most vulnerable, the elderly (over 75 is the current goal, according to the Federal authorities). Outside of the people who need to care for them, the elderly are our biggest concern.

We ask everyone to be patient, because this is a big project, and although we have put thought and effort into planning for this, the nature of the vaccine and the speed of the rollout before the release of the vaccine nationwide, has made planning a challenge.

There is a lot going on all around the country this week, to modify plans and shift gears to accommodate vaccines and all the logistical issues that go with them. Until the vaccine is available to us at greater quantities, the vaccine will not be available for most Del Norters. We will continue to communicate with the public about who the vaccine is available to at each stage of this process. Thank you for your patience.

Dr. Warren Rehwaldt

Del Norte County Public Health Officer