



BERRIEN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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For Immediate Release

Contact: Gillian Conrad
(269) 927-5624
gconrad@bchdmi.org

COVID-19 Vaccination Efforts Underway in Berrien County

Berrien County Health Department focuses on vaccinating first priority groups

(Berrien County, MI) - As of December 29th, 2020, the Berrien County Health Department (BCHD) has received its initial allotment of Moderna COVID-19 vaccine doses. Frontline staff at the Health Department, including those who will be providing the vaccine to others, began receiving their first doses to prepare for the upcoming mass vaccination efforts.

Following [guidance set forth by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services](#), the Berrien County Health Department is currently focusing on providing vaccines to those individuals in Phase 1-A, Priority Groups 1 and 2, including Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel, medical first responders, and some long-term care facility workers and residents. Concurrently, local hospital systems are vaccinating their health care workers, and [pharmacies](#) are vaccinating residents and staff of most long-term care facilities. BCHD anticipates moving to vaccinating Phase 1-A, Priority Group 3 within the next seven to ten days. Vaccination for these priority groups is being coordinated directly with the entities involved; clinics are not open to the general public at this time.

The prioritization guidance has an emphasis on ensuring continued functioning of the health care system and essential services in the community, and protecting people at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. As vaccine availability increases, those who fall into lower-risk groups will qualify. Communication regarding vaccination progress in Berrien County, a tentative estimated timeline for the future, and notification for which groups will be next in line can be found through the Berrien County Health Department [website](#), social media channels, and by signing up for the [community newsletter](#).

“Vaccination is a critical tool in slowing the spread of COVID-19 and bringing an end to this pandemic,” said Nicki Britten, health officer, Berrien County Health Department. “This is what public health is here for; this safe and effective vaccine will be an important step forward in protecting the health of residents of Berrien County.”

Vaccination in one phase may not be complete before vaccination in another phase begins. There may be vaccination of individuals in different phases that occurs simultaneously. The timing of the start of vaccination in a phase is dependent on the supply of vaccine from the manufacturer, how vaccine is allocated from the federal level to Michigan, and the capacity to administer the vaccine to the different populations. It is projected that all residents ages 16+ will be able to get vaccinated by mid-to-late 2021.

The Moderna vaccine, which was allocated to the Berrien County Health Department, is a two-dose vaccine. The first and second doses are spaced 28 days apart. After the second dose, the Moderna vaccine is 94.5% effective at preventing COVID-19 infection. The two doses of the Moderna vaccine

cannot be mixed and matched with the similar Pfizer vaccine, although both vaccines use similar [messenger RNA \(mRNA\) technology](#). While these are the first mainstream vaccines that use this technology, mRNA technology for vaccines has been studied for some time. The Moderna vaccine has an [Emergency Use Authorization](#) from the [FDA](#) and is recommended for individuals who are aged 18 and older.

“It has been long established in the medical and scientific community that vaccination, where possible, is the best strategy in infectious disease prevention,” said Dr. Rick Johansen, medical director, Berrien County Health Department. “Vaccines work with your own natural defenses to safely develop immunity to disease. The Moderna vaccine has been highly effective in clinical trials and we are optimistic that vaccination will help us beat COVID-19.”

Even after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, individuals should continue to take precautions such as social distancing, hand washing, and mask wearing. These disease prevention measures will need to be maintained until pandemic activity is sufficiently reduced.

For updates regarding BCHD’s COVID-19 vaccination efforts, please visit www.bchdmi.org/COVID-19 and sign up for the community newsletter. Additional resources can be found at a new website, supported by a regional collaborative, Vaccinate West Michigan, at vaccinatewestmi.com.

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[Images included:](#)

COVID Vaccine 1: Sofia De Jong, Emergency Medical Service Provider for Southwest Michigan Community Ambulance Services (SMACAS) receives her COVID-19 vaccine.

COVID Vaccine 2: Julie Billingsley, RN at Berrien County Health Department receives her COVID-19 vaccine.

COVID Vaccine 3: Berrien County Health Department prepares for vaccination clinics.

COVID Vaccine 4: Vial of Moderna vaccine, being used by Berrien County Health Department