



Department of Public Health and Human Services

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Greg Gianforte, Governor

Adam Meier, Director

February 2, 2021

Message to Montana's educators:

Governor Gianforte and the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) are committed to protecting Montana's most vulnerable citizens from COVID-19, and that includes Montana's educators.

The [COVID-19 vaccine distribution recommendations](#) were updated on January 5, 2021 to immediately prioritize educators whose age or specific health conditions put them at risk for serious COVID-19 complications.

The updated recommendations are meant to protect those most vulnerable and prevent additional hospitalizations and more deaths. Nearly 75% of COVID-19 deaths in Montana are those 70 years of age and older.

"I believe that our teachers, who have gone from teaching in front of classrooms to teaching in front of computer screens, are heroes. Ultimately, the changes that were made to the state's vaccination plan will save lives by protecting Montanans most at risk for serious complications, including seniors and those with severe underlying health conditions."

Governor Greg Gianforte

And, the vast majority of individuals that have died due to COVID-19, both younger and older, have had underlying high-risk medical conditions (e.g., cardiovascular disease). In Montana, of hospitalized patients with data available, about 80% indicated they have at least one pre-existing condition.

On the vaccination front, progress is being made. As of February 2, 2021, over 110,000 doses have been administered in Montana, and nearly 28,000 people have been fully immunized. Vaccine numbers are updated daily on a new dashboard Governor Gianforte [recently launched](#).

Case rates in Montana have begun to decline from the surge in October and hospitalization rates have stabilized. Montanans need to continue to practice basic public health prevention methods to keep case numbers low while the vaccine rollout continues: wear a mask to protect yourself and others, practice social distancing by staying six feet apart, stay home if you are sick, cover your cough, wash your hands often, and avoid large crowds.

More good news is that we are already into Phase 1B. This phase includes Montanans 70 years of age and older, 16 to 69 years of age with high-risk medical conditions, and Native Americans and other persons of color who may be at elevated risk for COVID-19 complications.

COVID-19 is both a health and an economic crisis. As you well know, it has significantly impacted our education system as well.

Montana's teacher workforce is vital. It's important to note that many educators, and many others in Montana's workforce, will fall into the 1B category. The new recommendations focus on age and specific health conditions.

If you're a teacher 16 to 69 years of age and have one of the following health conditions, you are eligible for 1B. These conditions include: Cancer, chronic kidney disease, COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), Down Syndrome, heart conditions, immunocompromised state (weakened immune system) from organ transplant, severe obesity, sickle cell disease, and type 1 and 2 diabetes. On a case-by-case basis, medical providers may include individuals with other conditions that place them at elevated risk for COVID-19 related complications. This does include pregnant women. DPHHS recommends pregnant women consult with their medical provider prior to getting the vaccine. Information from the CDC regarding the COVID-19 vaccine and [pregnant women is here](#).

A few additional key points:

- **DOSES ARE ARRIVING TO MONTANA EVERY WEEK:** DPHHS understands that the State is not receiving enough vaccine from the federal government to vaccinate all those in 1B simultaneously. However, Montana does request the maximum amount every week, and those doses are distributed to local jurisdictions as quickly as possible to be administered at the local level.
- **NEW WEBSITE:** For updated Montana vaccine information, go the DPHHS website at <https://dphhs.mt.gov/covid19vaccine>. The website includes [local contact information](#) by county that is updated regularly to keep Montanans informed about vaccine availability and scheduling at the local level.

Even if you're not in 1B, please stay informed so when it's your turn and vaccine availability increases in your local jurisdiction, you are ready. The [COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective](#) and is one of the tools that will help stop the pandemic.

Thank you and keep up the great work during these challenging times.

Sincerely,



Adam Meier, Director
DPHHS