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## St. Luke's Prepared for COVID-19 Vaccine This Week First Supply Earmarked For Three Groups Per CDC.

By Sam Kennedy

Bethlehem, PA – St. Luke's University Health Network will be among the initial group of hospitals in Pennsylvania to receive the recently approved and much anticipated COVID-19 vaccine in Phase 1a of the nationwide effort to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

"This is a pivotal moment in our fight against COVID," says Jeffrey Jahre, MD, infectious disease expert and St. Luke's Senior Vice President of Medical and Academic Affairs. "The world has been waiting for this vaccine, and we are on the cusp of being able to provide it."

St. Luke's is prepared to receive its first supply this week. However, the quantity will be limited and prioritized based on a structured plan provided by federal and state agencies. The general public's ability to receive the vaccine is still several weeks, maybe months, away.

The Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) has pre-determined the rollout of the vaccine and broken the timeline into three phases. Phase 1a will deliver limited supplies of the vaccine to health care institutions around the country and will be administered ONLY to front-line health care workers, EMS first responders and residents in long-term care facilities such as nursing homes.

"While there are different opinions on whom should be vaccinated first, the CDC and the Department of Health have decided that health care workers, and EMS first responders receive initial priority due to their high risk of exposure to COVID-19, and the need to maintain a healthy workforce to continue to provide care," explains Peter Ender, MD, St. Luke's Chief of Infectious Disease.

"Even among health care workers there will be flexibility to determine who should be vaccinated in the initial days of the roll-out. These decisions are being made by a committee with multiple areas of expertise including a medical ethicist.

As for our older adults in nursing homes, it's important that we prioritize those who have the most difficult time fighting off the virus."

The next phase, says Dr. Ender, will include a larger supply and will cover the same individuals from Phase 1a (the vaccine is a two-part shot) as well as essential workers, such as education, food service and transportation personnel.

This news comes on the heels of the FDA's approval of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for Emergency Use Authorization (EUA).

"While there is still a lot to learn about the vaccines, I have confidence in our scientific and medical communities and their governing bodies," Dr. Jahre says. "I will be getting the vaccine when it's my turn."

**Who Gets It When?**

Who receives the vaccine in what order is not up to any individual hospital or health care provider. Vaccine allotments are determined by each state's Department of Health, and distribution is governed by the ACIP's recommended phased approach:

Phase 1a (Current Phase)

LIMITED SUPPLY. Initial efforts will focus on reaching the following populations:

Health care personnel with direct or indirect exposure to COVID-19 patients, including EMS first responders; and

Residents of long-term care facilities (ex. Nursing Homes).

Phase 1b

Phase 1a critical populations who were not yet vaccinated; and

Essential workers (ex. Education Sector, Food & Agriculture, Utilities, Police, Firefighters, Corrections Officers, Transportation).

Phase 1c

Remaining individuals from Phase 1b; and

Adults with high-risk medical conditions; and

Adults 65+

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/.../slides-2020-12/COVID-02-Dooling.p>

Following the rollout of Phase 1a-c, recommendations will be made by the ACIP for rollout to the remainder of our population. The above plan is subject to change, and updates can be found here. Additional information about future phases of vaccine distribution will be communicated as it becomes available.

For updates from St. Luke's, visit: [sluhn.org/covid-19](http://sluhn.org/covid-19).

Photo and video footage of vaccine arrival/distribution available upon request, as available. Please contact Marketing Director Kate Raymond at [kate.raymond@sluhn.org](mailto:kate.raymond@sluhn.org).

