

COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution and Prioritization: Frequently Asked Questions

1) Can I get a vaccine now?

For most people, not yet. While there are COVID-19 vaccines arriving and being administered in Snohomish County, we do not have enough to offer it to everyone just yet. Until there is enough vaccine for everyone who wants it, we are following state and federal guidance to help make those tough decisions on who gets the vaccine first. Even if we had an adequate supply of vaccine to cover the entire population, capacity to administer vaccines is also limited. These scarce resources (vaccine, administration capacity) must be allocated over time in a manner to achieve the most benefit for society (greatest good for the greatest number).

Right now we are in [Phase 1a](#), which is focused on high-risk workers in healthcare settings and first responders, as well as residents and staff of long-term care facilities. We will soon open up vaccinations for all other workers in health care settings, once high-risk workers are vaccinated. This phase represents more than 40,000 people in Snohomish County, so it will take time.

After the vaccination of high-risk workers in health care settings are completed, Phase 1a expands to include all other workers in healthcare settings.

More information about the next phases will be provided as it is available. We encourage you to visit www.snohd.org/covidvaccine for updates.

2) Who is in the next phase?

Snohomish County is currently in Phase 1a. After all or most of the people within Phase 1a who want to be vaccinated have been vaccinated, we can advance to Phase 1b.

Phase 1b, as currently adopted by the Washington State Department of Health, has four tiers:

- B1
 - All people 70 years and older
 - People 50 years and older who live in multigenerational households
- B2
 - High-risk critical workers 50 years and older who work in congregate settings: agriculture; food processing; grocery stores; K-12 (teachers and school staff); child care; corrections, prisons, jails, or detention facilities (staff); public transit; fire; law enforcement
- B3
 - People 16 years or older with 2 or more co-morbidities or underlying conditions that have been linked to higher risks of severe COVID infections or complications.
- B4
 - High-risk critical workers in congregate settings under 50 years old
 - People, staff, and volunteers of all ages in congregate living settings: correctional facilities; group homes for people with disabilities; shelters for people experiencing homelessness.

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3) When does the next phase or tier start?

We do not have a firm date for when Phase 1b will begin in Snohomish County. There are roughly 40,000 people within Phase 1a to vaccinate. The goal is to move to Phase 1b as soon as possible, and work is ongoing to expand vaccination options and access in Snohomish County.

If you believe you are in Phase 1b, please hold off calling for an appointment until Phase 1b goes into effect. Our vaccine providers are currently busy taking calls for and scheduling Phase 1a vaccinations. It is important that we all let them focus on those in order to continue on to Phase 1b as quickly as we can.

4) What are the underlying conditions or co-morbidities eligible for vaccination under Phase 1b3?

Adults with certain underlying medical conditions are at increased risk for severe illness from the virus that causes COVID-19. Severe illness from COVID-19 is defined as hospitalization, admission to the ICU, intubation or mechanical ventilation, or death.

Those over 16 who have two or more of the following would be eligible under Phase 1b3:

- Asthma (moderate-to-severe)
- Cancer
- Chronic kidney disease
- COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
- Cystic fibrosis
- Down Syndrome
- Heart conditions, such as heart failure, coronary artery disease, or cardiomyopathies
- Hypertension or high blood pressure
- Immunocompromised state (weakened immune system) from blood or bone marrow transplant, immune deficiencies, HIV, use of corticosteroids, or use of other immune weakening medicines
- Immunocompromised state (weakened immune system) from solid organ transplant
- Neurologic conditions, such as dementia
- Liver disease
- Obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 30 kg/m² or higher)
- Pulmonary fibrosis (having damaged or scarred lung tissues)
- Pregnancy
- Sickle cell disease
- Smoking
- Thalassemia (a type of blood disorder)
- Type 1 and 2 diabetes

For more information about these conditions, please see the [CDC's website](https://www.cdc.gov).

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5) What if I share a household with someone who is high-risk; can I get the vaccine when they do?

Not yet, unless you are eligible under the same phase or tier. If you share a household with someone who is high-risk based on age, underlying health conditions, or the nature of their work and exposure risk, it's important to maintain all health measures for yourself and to get vaccinated when your turn comes in the phased approach.

If the person you live with gets vaccinated before you do, this will help reduce the risk of them catching or spreading the virus. However, to keep your household member and yourself healthy, it's still vital to take steps like handwashing, cleaning and sanitizing, and avoiding large gatherings or any gatherings that are indoors or unmasked.

Those who are older than 50 and live in multigenerational households (currently defined as two or more generations in the same household) will be eligible for vaccination in the first tier of Phase 1b (Phase 1b1).

6) How and where do I get vaccinated?

There are multiple options for getting vaccinated against COVID-19 in Snohomish County, and we expect those options and access to expand in the coming weeks and months.

1. Once you become eligible, check with your primary healthcare provider, clinic or local pharmacy on their vaccination process.
2. If you are eligible under Phase 1a, your employer may provide vaccination if they are an approved COVID vaccine provider. They also may partner with a pharmacy or medical provider on vaccination clinics, or provide a voucher for you to get vaccinated by one of the other COVID vaccine providers in our county.
 - a. If you are an employer and staff are eligible under Phase 1a, visit www.snohd.org/covidvaccinevoucher for more information on vouchers or to submit a request.
 - b. If you are an employee who is eligible in the first phase, please talk to your employer. You can share the www.snohd.org/covidvaccinevoucher link with them for information.
3. Several vaccination sites are under development by the Snohomish County Vaccine Taskforce. These sites are meant to enhance vaccination efforts and supplement the existing healthcare system. Vaccination at these sites is by appointment only. If multiple people in the same household are eligible and being vaccinated at the same time, they each need individual appointments. Information on who is eligible for vaccination and what vaccination sites are available will be updated online as that information emerges.

The Washington State Department of Health will soon be launching an online tool to determine what phase you will be in. Visit www.snohd.org/covidvaccine or www.covidvaccinewa.org for updates.

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7) Do I need insurance?

[According to the CDC](#), vaccine doses purchased with taxpayer dollars will be given at no cost in the United States. However, vaccine providers may charge an administration fee for giving the shot to someone. For those without insurance, the vaccine still is provided at no cost. Vaccine providers can get the administration fee for uninsured patients reimbursed by the Health Resources and Services Administration's Provider Relief Fund.

Those who have health insurance should have their insurance information with them when they make an appointment and when they show up for vaccination. Vaccine providers may not bill patients for any portion of the vaccine administration fee that is not covered by insurance.

8) How long will it take to vaccinate enough people so that we can resume more pre-pandemic activities?

Like any new process, it will take time for the vaccine distribution and administration to ramp up to the point where we can vaccinate everyone in Snohomish County who wants to be vaccinated. This is why it will likely take many months for the benefits of vaccine to be seen at a population-wide level. Most estimates suggest that 70-80% of the population would need to be vaccinated, and we hope to reach those levels within about 6-9 months. We haven't really been here before, so estimates on how long it will take for society to open up and life to normalize are more educated guesses than predictions.

However, vaccines are just one part of the equation. The new [Healthy Washington: Roadmap to Recovery](#) provides a framework for regions to safely ease some restrictions while also maintaining crucial hospital capacity. Throughout the vaccination process, we must keep up with existing health measures, including masking, physical distancing, and avoiding social gatherings with people you don't live with. These preventive measures can help achieve the decline transmission levels so further economic recovery can happen.

9) Is the COVID vaccine mandatory?

Washington is not currently considering any mandates for the vaccine, but employers could require it. The Snohomish Health District recommends that all people who qualify get vaccinated unless they have a specific medical condition that indicates otherwise. The vaccine will help protect you from becoming ill with COVID-19. We encourage you to review trustworthy credible sources of information to help you make the best choice for you.

10) Why is it taking so long to get all of the vaccines out?

We know everyone is looking forward to it being their turn to getting the vaccine, and everyone is working as fast as possible to make that happen. Most vaccination campaigns that occur under non-emergency conditions take at least a year to plan and several years to reach good coverage. Considering multiple vaccines were developed and manufactured within a year of the virus being identified in this country, and we already have thousands of people vaccinated here in Snohomish County, the timeline is pretty remarkable.

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An entire personal and public health care system is having to reframe staffing, space, materials and other resources to implement this. Enough vaccine needs to be distributed to providers, and there needs to be enough providers available to administer the vaccine. Logistics such as scheduling, locations, staffing, and managing records for things like second-dose follow-up take time to put in place and require resources and staffing to implement. This is all on top of a pandemic that has already significantly strained the systems, simultaneously working to test those potentially exposed, prevent outbreaks from happening, and treat those infected.

Planning for and standing up large-scale vaccination sites are also quite different from testing sites. There is an approval process for administering vaccines, requiring specially trained personnel to perform the vaccination. Specific storage and supply requirements need to be factored into site selection. Information needs to be verified for the patient to ensure they are both eligible for the phase and a candidate for the vaccine being provided based on medical history. After being vaccinated, individuals must be observed for a period of time to watch for possible reactions. Immunization records need to be provided to the individual, which includes the lot number for the specific vial the vaccine is being drawn from. Those records also need to be entered into the statewide immunization registry.

In the coming weeks and months, we expect the COVID vaccine distribution and administration process will become much smoother and the pace of vaccination will increase significantly.

11) I hear stories about vaccines being wasted or expiring. Is that happening here in Snohomish County?

We have not received any reports of vaccine wasting locally, nor are there concerns at this time about vaccines expiring in Snohomish County before they can be used.

12) Other counties or states are vaccinating different people/groups first. How was the prioritization in Snohomish County determined?

Our goal is to harmonize with the Washington State Department of Health's phase allocation direction. These have been adapted from thoroughly researched and highly detailed work conducted by vaccine, public health, and ethics experts with the National Academy of Medicine and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. DOH also conducted surveys among consumers and other key stakeholders in Washington State that it incorporated into the development of their framework. For more information on their process, contact covidvaccine@doh.wa.gov.

As the process moves along, it will be important to consider a county's population and workforce characteristics. Some counties or regions are known for being healthcare or medical hubs, meaning it will take longer to vaccinate Phase 1a individuals. Others have much smaller communities and the ability to reach more vaccine coverage in a shorter period of time.

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13) I have heard about people getting vaccines that aren't currently eligible. How is that possible?

This occasionally happens if there are no-shows or more people vaccinated than anticipated. For instance, the Moderna vaccine comes in a vial that holds enough for 10 doses. Once it reaches a particular temperature or has been opened, it needs to be used within six hours. To avoid vaccine waste, it may be reasonable to vaccinate what we call "sub-eligible" candidates with residual vaccine from vials that would otherwise have to be discarded if not used within a few hours. These sub-eligible candidates are usually close to eligible based on their work duties and/or site of employment. Beyond that, the Health District has not endorsed vaccination of ineligible or sub-eligible individuals.