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PUBLIC HEALTH LEADERS WELCOME STATE'S DECISION TO MORE ACTIVELY ENGAGE LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS IN COVID-19 VACCINATION ACTIVITIES

Local Health Departments Now Receiving and Rapidly Administering Shots in Their Communities for Eligible Populations

In Partnership with Regional HUB and Community Partners, LHDs Will Continue Vaccinating Eligible Populations This Week

(Albany, New York) The New York State Association of County Health Officials (NYSACHO) today welcomed the State's decision to more actively engage New York's 58 local health departments (LHDs) in efforts to vaccinate New Yorkers.

With the decision, decades of local health department mass vaccination planning is paying off as LHDs are setting up points of distribution (PODs) in their communities and vaccinating eligible populations.

Local Health Departments will be working closely with local hospitals, FQHCs and other healthcare partners that have been and will continue to administer vaccine to the eligible groups. This week, they will begin reaching out to eligible groups identified in the 1B category to coordinate vaccine distribution. Once national vaccine supply is increased, and LHDs receive larger allocations from the state, LHDs plan to expand operations.

While available vaccine stocks remain subject to state and national supply chains, many LHDs received doses of vaccine last week, which have been quickly administered to those eligible for vaccination (see eligibility details here: <https://covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/>).

Dr. Kevin Watkins, President of NYSACHO, said: "We are extremely pleased that the state has engaged our LHDs and is trusting our public health essential workers to help carry out the critical function of vaccinating New Yorkers. Every LHD has been training and drilling on mass vaccination and points of dispensing (POD) plans for decades, and their expertise is already speeding the dissemination of the vaccine. In fact, most counties who were provided vaccine just last week have already used all or most of the doses the state has provided."

Watkins said the decision to engage LHDs is a good first step, while adding that there are numerous details to be clarified over the ensuing days.

“We’re establishing an effective public-private partnership between state and local government and our community hospitals and health systems. It closely mirrors the successful cooperative model New York employed to battle H1N1 several years back,” Watkins said. “Vaccine is getting out to priority populations, but it will take time. Local health departments thank our citizens for being patient as we work to vaccinate these first priority, high-risk and vulnerable populations. We ask for their continued patience as we roll out this historic public health vaccination campaign. Now that a safe, effective vaccine is available, with each vaccine administered, we move one dose closer to the end of this pandemic.”

At great personal risk, LHD public health essential workers have been protecting their communities through their COVID-19 response since the pandemic’s inception, providing critical lifesaving services including disease surveillance, contact tracing, public education and expanding COVID-19 testing. They have been assisting innumerable entities, including: hospitals; EMS squads; other local, state and federal government agencies; schools; colleges; other congregate care facilities; and host of community based organizations. And they have been responsive to hundreds of thousands of inquiries from the public.

“With the engagement of our LHDs we are confident that New York is poised to more quickly vaccinate eligible populations and move on to the succession of other eligible groups,” Watkins said. “Our members have been neck deep since day one and they are ready to do what they do best.

“On behalf of the NYSACHO Board of Directors, membership and staff, we want to say to the thousands of LHD essential workers: ‘We see you, we see the ceaseless hours of incredibly hard work and sacrifice. We know you put yourselves at risk to help your community and we could not be more proud of and awed by how you have responded to this monumental public health challenge. You have our eternal thanks, and we will keep fighting for you.’”

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