

# EXPLAINER: Vaccine push gains steam but many still face wait

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More Americans are now eligible to get a COVID-19 vaccine but they may still face a wait for their first shot even as supplies increase.

Drugstore pharmacists are now doling out the shots in many states, and sports arenas and fairgrounds are planning big clinics. This latest push is focused for now on people deemed most vulnerable to the coronavirus.

The government this week announced it will no longer hold back the required second doses of vaccines, boosting supplies for first shots.

A closer look:

## WHEN IS MY TURN?

It all depends on your age, your health and where you work or live. States ultimately determine the order in which people qualify for the [vaccine](#), although the [federal government](#) is offering guidance.

First up: Front-line health care workers and nursing home residents, who started receiving shots last month. States are now expanding to other categories to include others deemed at high risk from COVID-19, like people age 75 and older, firefighters and teachers.

This week, [federal health officials](#) urged states to speed things up even more and lower the threshold to age 65 and up. Florida and Georgia and Washington, D.C., had already started doing this.

Federal officials also suggested including people under 65 who have certain [health problems](#) that make them more vulnerable if they get sick.

The vaccine is likely months away for most younger people. The two vaccines available in the U.S. haven't been authorized for children.

## WHERE CAN I GET THE VACCINE?

The options are expanding and vary depending on where you live.

Pharmacies are already doling out vaccines to eligible customers in states like Alaska, California, Florida, New Jersey and Texas. That list will

grow and it will include grocers and retailers like Walmart that have pharmacies, aside from just drugstores like CVS or Walgreens.

Football stadiums, major league ballparks and fairgrounds are being turned into vaccination sites around the country so health officials can ramp up shots while allowing people to maintain social distance.

A vaccination site opened Wednesday at New York City's Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, which was used as a field hospital after the [coronavirus](#) pandemic first struck last spring.

Check with your state or local health department for information on open sites near you. [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) 's website offers links to state health departments and their vaccination plans.

Some states like Arizona, California and Virginia have allowed counties to determine who is eligible to receive the vaccine next, said Jennifer Tolbert of the non-profit Kaiser Family Foundation.

## WILL I NEED AN APPOINTMENT?

Yes. At least initially, sites will require people to sign up ahead of time and verify that they are eligible for a shot.

Appointments can usually be scheduled online and also by phone. But expect some delays in signing up and finding a free slot.

The registration system in Washington, D.C., was quickly overwhelmed after the city opened up vaccines to residents 65 and older on Monday. People reported problems with the website and hours-long waits to register by phone.

## WILL I WAIT IN LINE?

You may have to sit in your car or stand in line depending on where you get the vaccine. But appointments are designed to minimize those waits and allow people to maintain a safe social distance while in line.

Georgia pharmacist Jonathan Marquess said Tuesday that he has given out about 1,000 shots so far, and his customers haven't had to wait long. The independent drugstore owner said he's spaced appointments 10 minutes apart to avoid lines and keep people apart.

"Be patient, we will get to you," he said.

## HOW WILL THE VACCINATIONS WORK?

The process is fairly simple, like getting a flu shot. People may have to show their identification or verify their eligibility before they get jabbed in the arm. Shots will be recorded in state and local vaccine registries.

Those with a history of severe allergic reactions may be asked to wait 30 minutes after the shot before leaving, while most others will only have to wait 15 minutes. This will be required even for people who use drive-through clinics.

Pharmacists and nurses are trained to handle the rare allergic reactions that can occur, said Kathleen Jaeger, an executive with the National Association of Chain Drug Stores.

"This is not new to the COVID vaccine," she said, noting that some sort of waiting period is recommended for all vaccines.

There are two vaccines available in the U.S. made by Pfizer and Moderna. Both require two doses three or four weeks apart for full

coverage. Recipients can expect to receive a card and phone or email reminders to return for their second shot of the same vaccine.

## WHAT'S THE COST?

It should be free. The government is paying for the vaccine itself. And you shouldn't be charged a copay or other fee to get it.

The cost for giving the shot will be covered by private and government insurance. If you don't have insurance, providers can tap a government fund to cover costs.

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