

MEMORANDUM

To: Agency Directors of all state agencies and institutions of higher education
From: Marcia Adams
Date: March 3, 2021
Subject: COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Plan and State Employees

Disclaimer: This guidance is based on the information available at this time and will be updated as more information becomes available.

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide answers to frequently asked questions about COVID-19 vaccines as they relate to state employees following the March 2, 2021, [announcement regarding Phases 1b and 1c of the state's plan for COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation](#). The guidance in this memorandum is based on the information available to the South Carolina Department of Administration (Admin) at the time of publication and will be updated as needed.

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) and Admin are thankful that many agencies and employees have expressed eagerness to get vaccinated. We know that employers and employees want to be vaccinated as soon as possible. **Please remind employees that the best way to support an effective rollout of the vaccine program in South Carolina is to allow those employees at increased occupational risk of exposure to receive the vaccine first.** It is also important to remind employees that as vaccine supplies increase, everyone will have access to the vaccine.

For up-to-date information about vaccinations, please visit DHEC's website:

scdhec.gov/vaxfacts.

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

FAQ 1: Which state employees are eligible to be vaccinated in Phase 1b, and when does Phase 1b start?

According to DHEC, individuals eligible to be vaccinated in Phase 1b may make appointments beginning Monday, March 8, 2021.

Currently, five groups of individuals are eligible in Phase 1b. Those groups are:

- **Anyone age 55 and older.**
- **People with increased risk for severe COVID-19 disease.**
 - **People age 16-54 with one or more of the following high-risk medical conditions:**
 - Cancer (current, not a history of cancer), chronic kidney disease (any stage), chronic lung disease, diabetes (Type 1 and Type 2), Down syndrome, heart disease (congestive heart disease, coronary artery disease, cardiomyopathy, pulmonary hypertension), HIV/AIDS, solid organ transplant, obesity (BMI >30), pregnancy, sickle cell disease.
 - People who have a developmental or other severe high-risk disability that makes developing severe life-threatening illness or death from COVID-19 infection more likely.
- **Front-line workers with increased occupational risk.**
 - Must be in-person at their place of work; and
 - Perform a job in which they are at increased risk of exposure due to **frequent, close (less than 6 feet) and ongoing (more than 15 minutes) contact** with others in the work environment.
 - Examples of state employees who meet these criteria include staff that are in the workplace such as teachers, law enforcement officers, and other employees who have regular, sustained contact with customers or clients. It does not include all essential employees but is limited to only those employees working in-person at their place of work, working on the front line and who are at increased occupational risk of exposure.
- **Individuals at increased risk in settings where people are living and working in close contact.**
 - Residents and workers in group home settings for the mentally or physically disabled or those with behavioral or substance abuse conditions
 - Workers and residents in homeless shelters
 - Workers and residents in community training homes
 - State and local correctional facility staff with direct inmate contact

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- Correctional and immigration detention facility inmates
- Migrant farmworkers living in shared housing or reliant on shared transportation
- All workers in health care and community health settings who have routine, direct patient contact and were not vaccinated in Phase 1a
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FAQ 2: If employees fall into a category that makes them eligible for a vaccine, what do they need to do to make an appointment, and what documentation will they be required to provide?

Eligible employees should contact providers directly to schedule an appointment unless the agency has an enrolled provider available to employees. To locate a vaccine provider, employees should visit scdhec.gov/vaxlocator.

The type of documentation required to make an appointment and/or receive a vaccine will vary from provider to provider and be based on the qualifying reason. For example, individuals qualifying based on age (age 55 and older), will likely be asked to provide a government issued identification card, such as a driver's license, which lists their date of birth.

FAQ 3: Which state employees are eligible to be vaccinated in Phase 1c, and when does Phase 1c start?

According to DHEC, individuals eligible to be vaccinated in Phase 1c are anticipated to be able to make appointments beginning on approximately Monday, April 12, 2021.

Currently, two groups of individuals are eligible in Phase 1c:

- **Anyone age 45 and older.**
- **Essential workers.**
 - This group includes those who work in essential job categories as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) who are not included in Phase 1b because they do not have frequent, close contact with others in the work environment (examples may include construction workers, delivery drivers, utility workers, etc. who do not have frequent, close and ongoing contact with others).

FAQ 4: Will the vaccine be mandatory for state employees?

No, the vaccine will not be mandatory for state employees as they become eligible for the vaccine. State employees are strongly encouraged to receive the vaccine when they become eligible to receive it.

FAQ 5: Are employees required to use their leave to receive vaccinations?

Employees are encouraged to be vaccinated during lunch breaks, outside of work hours or on-site, if available. Agencies are encouraged to be flexible to allow employees the opportunity to obtain the vaccine when it becomes available.

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If an employee is unable to receive the vaccine during non-work hours, or to make up the work time missed to receive the vaccine, the employee will be required to use leave for their time away from work.

FAQ 6: Will vaccinated employees be required to continue adhering to their agency's health and safety protocols?

Yes, even after employees have received all required doses of the vaccine, all state employees are expected to continue to follow their agency's health and safety protocols including maintaining physical distancing, washing hands for 20 seconds and wearing face coverings. Currently, the CDC and DHEC recommend using "all the tools" to prevent the spread of COVID-19 because there is not enough information to endorse disregarding other protective measures after receiving the vaccine.

FAQ 7: Do vaccinated employees still need to quarantine?

According to DHEC, if a fully vaccinated person has close contact to a confirmed COVID-19 case, they will not be required to quarantine if they meet the following criteria:

- Are fully vaccinated (two or more weeks following receipt of the second shot in a two-dose series, or more than two weeks following receipt of one shot in a single-dose vaccine);
- Are within three months following receipt of the last dose in the series; and
- Have remained asymptomatic since the current exposure.

FAQ 8: What documentation, if any, can an agency require from vaccinated employees?

Agencies may request documentation directly from the employee. Please note this documentation may consist of a copy of the vaccination card or a printout from an online pharmacy or medical portal. Confidentiality requirements related to medical documentation apply to these records.

FAQ 9: Will employees have to pay for vaccines?

No, the federal government will cover the cost of the vaccine and individuals will not incur out-of-pocket expenses for the vaccine or for vaccine administration. However, health care providers may charge an office visit fee in some cases. No one can be denied a vaccine if they are unable to pay a vaccine administration fee, and no one should receive a bill for receiving the vaccine.

Anyone who has received their vaccine and has a question about any charges, fees or associated costs should contact their vaccine provider.

FAQ 10: What leave options are available to employees if they have a reaction to the vaccine?

If an employee experiences a reaction, agencies should follow their normal sick leave policy and practices. Employees may contact their health care provider if they have questions about post-vaccination recovery.

Agencies planning to vaccinate a significant portion of their workforce through an enrolled provider may want to consider staggering the vaccinations for staff. This will allow agencies to ensure appropriate staffing numbers in the event a small percentage of vaccine recipients have a mild reaction following inoculation.