

Representative Dan Moul
91st District
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Media Contact: Donna Pinkham
717.260.6452
dpinkham@pahousegop.com
RepMoul.com

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COVID-19 Vaccine Has Arrived in PA

by Rep. Dan Moul (R-Adams)

After nearly a year and more than 320,000 deaths from COVID-19, we have finally received some promising news. Two new vaccines have now been approved by the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for distribution in the United States. In fact, the first doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine have already begun arriving in the Commonwealth.

The state's initial allotment of 97,500 doses is going to 87 hospitals statewide, including Wellspan Gettysburg Hospital. Because careful handling is required during the distribution of the Pfizer vaccine to maintain a temperature of minus 70 degrees, hospitals receiving the vaccine are being selected according to their ability to manage refrigeration and other necessary protocols. The Moderna COVID Vaccine, which was approved more recently, is less fussy, requiring only standard refrigeration. Both were highly anticipated and demonstrated to be safe and effective in clinical trials.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Health, supplies of the vaccines are limited at this time and will be available in phases beginning with critical populations such as health care workers, EMS first responders and residents and staff in congregate care settings. When the department has a sufficient supply of vaccine, it will be available to the general public - probably a few months from now. In the meantime, it is important for us to continue adhering to CDC health and safety protocols, including hand washing, wearing masks and social distancing.

Typically, it takes far longer than a year to develop a vaccine, conduct clinical trials and gain the approval of the FDA. Finding the pharmaceutical industry's lengthy timelines unacceptable, the Trump administration launched Operation Warp Speed, bringing together the professionals and resources needed to develop these vaccines in record time and the plans to distribute them. With the president's persistence, and focused efforts by medical experts in the field of infectious diseases, we can now begin to protect our citizens from this deadly virus. Most importantly, let's not forget those frontline health care workers who have fought and even died trying to save the lives of others. Their hard work, dedication and selflessness under extraordinarily difficult circumstances exemplifies what it is to be a hero.

This has been a tough year for all of us, particularly those who have lost loved ones to COVID-19, and the businesses and the countless individuals who have lost jobs and more in this pandemic and efforts to mitigate it. Our economy has taken a substantial hit for which the bill is still being tallied. It has been a disruptive year for our school children and their parents, who fear what has been lost and the time it will take to make it up.

Through all of it, the vaccine has been the one thing that would enable us to get back on track and begin to reclaim our former lives. Finally, it is here, and while it will take several more months for most of us to receive it, help is clearly on the way. For that, we can be truly thankful.

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