

## **COVID-19 VACCINE**

### **Frequently Asked Questions: Resources for AAA Network**

March 1, 2021

The Pennsylvania Department of Aging (PDA) is collaborating with other commonwealth agencies and working to assist the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) in the distribution of vaccines to the 65 and over population we serve, and adults with disabilities. Vaccination is a critical step in the crusade against COVID-19 to overcome this pandemic, and we want all older Pennsylvanians to be informed, feel safe, and be prepared to participate in the vaccination process. This document is intended to assist the AAA network in answering frequently asked questions and provide guidance on how AAA staff can answer questions from consumers regarding the COVID-19 vaccine rollout.

#### **Where can I go to learn more about the COVID-19 vaccine and the vaccination process?**

COVID-19 vaccine information is available on the [Department of Health](#) website and through the [Centers for Disease Control](#). The [CDC VaccineFinder tool](#) is available to connect consumers with available vaccine. Information regarding the COVID-19 vaccine should only be taken from reliable and credible sources.

#### **Will PDA require AAA staff, providers, vendors, or contractors to be vaccinated?**

No, there are no plans to make a COVID-19 vaccine mandatory, but we anticipate that those who are able will help us keep our communities safe by choosing to get a vaccine.

## **Will insurance cover a consumer's vaccination?**

For all of the following coverage types, an individual will not have to pay anything for the vaccine, including a copay, coinsurance, or deductible, regardless of whether the provider is in-network or out-of-network:

- The major-medical health insurance market (individual market health insurance)
- Insurance through your employer (including through COBRA)
- Medicare and Medicare Advantage
- Medical Assistance through fee-for-service and Managed Care Organizations (MCOs)
- Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)
- Pennsylvania Employees Benefit Trust Fund (PEBTF)

A consumer's insurance company or health care provider should be able to help them in finding a vaccination location.

For any other questions regarding health care coverage for the vaccine, please visit the [Department of Insurance's](#) website.

## **Can a AAA or service provider require staff to receive the vaccine?**

Providers must comply with all employment laws. PDA recommends that service providers consult with legal professionals regarding this issue.

## **Can a AAA or service provider refuse to provide services to an individual who has not been vaccinated for COVID-19 or require that an individual receive a vaccination for COVID-19?**

Providers cannot refuse to provide services to individuals who have not been vaccinated for COVID-19. This may constitute discrimination under either of the following laws:

- Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Individuals may not be discriminated against because of race, color, creed, disability, religious affiliation, ancestry, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin or age. Further, individuals have the right to make choices and accept risks.

When individuals choose not to get the COVID-19 vaccine, the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) network and contracted providers must make reasonable accommodations to render services in a manner that protects the health and wellness of staff and individuals receiving services.

Regardless of whether individuals have been vaccinated for COVID-19, the AAA network and contracted providers shall continue to implement COVID-19 mitigation strategies.

**How will AAA staff, senior center staff, and other volunteers prove that they meet the criteria for their applicable phase of the Interim Vaccination Plan?**

Providers are to show proof of occupation to receive a vaccine. This could include a state license or certification, letter from the AAA conveying proof of contractual relationship or employer on organization letterhead, facility identification/security badge, group listing on employer letterhead, or other proof of occupation.

**How can my AAA assist consumers who are home-bound and are unable to physically visit a location for a vaccine appointment?**

This option to go to individual homes does not currently exist, however we are evaluating plans to support homebound older adults in this situation. When these plans are determined and become an option, PDA will work with Area Agencies on Aging and other partners who can assist with supporting and scheduling home-administered vaccinations.

**How will unpaid caregivers prove that they are unpaid caregivers and therefore are eligible in phase 1A as defined in the Interim Vaccination Plan?**

Unpaid caregivers have been granted a letter from the Secretary of the PA Department of Aging (PDA) indicating their status as a caregiver and eligibility to

be vaccinated in phase 1A. The letter can be accessed through the [PDA website](#).

### **How does a Domiciliary Care provider prove they met the criteria for their applicable phase of the Interim Vaccination Plan?**

Domiciliary Care providers may use their Domiciliary Care Home Certificate or contact the AAA for a letter validating their status as a certified provider as acceptable proof to be vaccinated in phase 1A.

### **How will consent to be vaccinated be ascertained when the individual is unable to provide it and there is no present guardian?**

If a person has been determined unable to give consent to vaccination, and there is no guardian, then it is necessary to determine if the individual has been appointed a decision-maker as indicated by a valid Health Care Power of Attorney. 20 Pa. C.S. §§ 5441 – 5460. Where there is neither a valid Health Care Power of Attorney nor a guardian then a Health Care Representative may make a health care decision for an individual whose attending physician has determined that the individual is incompetent under very specific circumstances and limitations. 20 Pa. C.S. § 5461. Another option is to obtain a court appointed guardian to assist in the matter. In all cases, providers should consult with their legal counsel before proceeding.

### **How can my Area Agency on Aging help our consumers receive the vaccine?**

PDA recognizes that AAAs across the state have varying capacities in their ability to support our vaccine efforts. Below are best practices and examples for how your AAA can assist, which include, but are not limited to:

- Contacting consumers to see if they received their vaccination yet (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> doses), or utilizing a connection to a Health Information Exchange to check a consumer's vaccination status
- Identifying those who have not yet received the vaccine and providing those names to the PACE program or PA link for assistance
- Utilizing AAA staff or volunteers to help with scheduling appointments

- Utilizing [CDC VaccineFinder tool](#) to connect consumers with available vaccine
- Identifying those consumers who will need assistance with transportation to the vaccination site and arranging/paying for that transportation
  - CARES Act funding can be used for this and may also include “door through door” service.
- Providing vaccine education to consumers who decline a vaccine or are unsure about getting one.
- Identifying consumers who live alone without informal supports who are homebound or whose health or functional ability would prevent them from being able to travel to a vaccination site. (See suggestion below)
- Partnering with local health facilities/centers to aid in getting consumers vaccinated.

### **How are facilities that are not a part of the Federal Pharmacy Partnership (FPP) Program able to get the vaccine for their residents?**

Pennsylvania is participating in the FPP to coordinate vaccination efforts for skilled nursing facilities, which are licensed by DOH, as well as personal care homes, assisted living facilities, and intermediate care facilities for people with disabilities licensed by DHS. **PDA does not license nor regulate skilled nursing facilities, personal care homes, assisted living facilities, or intermediate care facilities.** Facilities enrolled in this program are receiving vaccinations from CVS Pharmacy and Walgreens. You can see the progress of vaccinations through the FPP on the [DHS website](#).

For staff and residents of long-term care facilities and congregate care settings licensed by DHS that are not part of the FPP, the DHS and DOH have formed a partnership with Rite Aid to administer COVID-19 vaccinations in these settings.

Due to the risk of COVID-19 outbreaks in congregate settings, long-term and congregate care settings are included in Phase 1A of Pennsylvania's Interim Vaccination Plan, including group homes for people with disabilities; residential treatment facilities and long-term structured residences for adults with

behavioral health needs; and private psychiatric hospitals. These settings serve people who have co-occurring medical needs that put them at risk of more severe cases if they contract the COVID-19 virus. Personal care homes and assisted living facilities that were not enrolled in the FPP will also be served by the partnership with Rite Aid. An estimated 6,000 facilities will be covered through this effort, and it will be a multi-week initiative to coordinate vaccination of all facilities based off vaccine supply available to Pennsylvania.

Clinics are also being established where residents and staff of DHS and DOH licensed facilities may go to obtain vaccine doses at a scheduled time. Vaccinations will take place on-site at facilities where individuals served are not able to travel to an off-campus clinic site. This effort is separate from the Retail Pharmacy Partnership program stated above.

Facilities are being contacted by their DHS or DOH licensing office with details to help them prepare for vaccinations and vaccination clinic schedules for their area. Facilities should not contact Rite Aid or Walgreens directly.

**This didn't answer my question. Who can I contact with questions?**

Questions from AAA staff can be directed to the Pennsylvania Department of Aging by calling at (717)783-1550 or emailing to [aging@pa.gov](mailto:aging@pa.gov).