

Finally! COVID Vaccinations for Physicians and Their Staff

We can all agree that the roll-out of the COVID vaccine has been slow and complicated. Under the state and federal mandates, Phase 1a vaccines go to physicians and front-line medical workers. However, the only physicians that have been able to get access to the vaccines are those who work at hospitals or have hospital privileges. What about the thousands of physicians and staff that do not have hospital privileges? For them, vaccinations are as scarce as hens' teeth. Many of them face COVID risk every day in their offices.

The Bexar County Medical Society (BCMS) saw this problem and began working on behalf of all physicians and their staff to make the vaccinations available to all physicians and their medical staffs. We began by talking with those institutions who had vaccine to see if they would include non-hospital affiliated health workers, especially physicians. BCMS pursued many leads only to find it frustrating to get traction.

Baptist called us one day and said they had 300 extra doses available at their North Central location and gave us five hours to get enough physicians there to use them up; the next day 200 more doses became available at downtown Baptist for both physicians and their staff. We worked the phones and got enough physicians to each location to take full advantage of that opportunity. Later Baptist also offered an additional 45 doses from their downtown location on a first-come, first-serve basis which made it difficult for people to get there in time to receive a vaccination, but we got the physicians and staff there as quickly as possible.

Melody Newsom, the BCMS Chief Operating Officer, spearheads the BCMS emergency preparedness efforts. She sits in on many of the medical community pow-wows about what is available, where and when. Melody was authorized by Steve Fitzer, the Society CEO, to push hard for physicians in her efforts to make the community aware of the Phase 1a medical professionals who were seemingly being left behind in this vaccine roll-out. It appeared the community was ready to move on to Phase 1b, when the Phase 1a mandate was far from being fulfilled.

As the medical community re-assessed the roll-out and the physicians who had not had access to vaccine, more support was given to Phase 1a completion. The City briefly set up one lane at the Alamo Dome just for Phase 1a. But the real breakthrough came on Sunday, January 10, 2021.

BCMS had been in discussions with H-E-B for several weeks to get doses of the vaccine dedicated for administration to physicians who had no other access. The first attempt at setting up a special event fell-through when not enough vaccine was available. Then H-E-B came through in a big way.

The Bexar County Medical Society sponsored, together with H-E-B Pharmacy, a first dose, COVID-19 vaccination event at BCMS headquarters on Loop 1604. Of course, that was the day of the nastiest weather of the year. But pouring rain, sleet and snow did not keep the BCMS physician members and their staff from braving the elements to receive their first dose of the COVID-19 Moderna vaccine. On that day, the H-E-B pharmacy team and students from the University of Incarnate Word School of Pharmacy vaccinated approximately 2,000 Phase 1a medical personnel.

This was an amazing, short-notice event! BCMS received confirmation on Thursday of the amount of vaccine; H-E-B confirmed they had the needed vaccinators and volunteers and provided the registration link midday Friday; the event was first communicated to the BCMS membership and the medical professionals on the H-E-B wait list Friday and Saturday. All appointments were filled before nightfall on Saturday. The next morning, Sunday, nearly 2,000 people showed up to get the vaccine between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm. Strict protocols were followed to ensure only those who had made appointments were vaccinated.

This was the first event where H-E-B administered COVID vaccine outside their own pharmacies. BCMS had some vacant clinical space which it used for this event, but also used its upstairs conference room. A total of 13-14 shot givers were in action to vaccinate the entire crowd. A huge **THANK YOU** to H-E-B for making this such a successful event!

BCMS will continue to work with local pharmacies, hospitals and community practices to arrange vaccinations for our physicians and their staff. Future vaccination clinics are being considered as vaccine becomes available. For those who received vaccines on January 10, in about 4 weeks they will be contacted by H-E-B to set an appointment for the second shot. It is expected the second shot will be given at the BCMS building.

For updates on vaccine availability and vaccination opportunities, please visit the BCMS website at www.bcms.org and click on the *BCMS Vaccine for Physicians* banner. Information is updated as information is available. Also, please complete the very short questionnaire *“Do you or your staff still need the FIRST dose of COVID-19 vaccine?”*. This will put you on the list to be contacted first when vaccination opportunities arise. This is a very fluid situation that changes rapidly and we want you to be the first to know!



Melody Newsom is the BCMS Chief Operating Officer and Liaison with Community Emergency Preparedness Entities



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