COVID-19 Vaccination
Frequently Asked Questions

Q: I am eligible for vaccination during Phase 1A because I have a qualifying pre-existing condition. Do I need to provide proof of my condition in order to schedule an appointment?

A: No. To our knowledge, there is no requirement to “prove” your eligibility if you have a qualifying pre-existing condition. You can check to see if you are eligible at this website.

Q: I am eligible for vaccination during Phase 1A, B, or C on the basis of my employment. Do I need to provide proof of where I work?

A: Maybe. From the information issued by the Department of Health (DOH), it is not clear whether you will need to establish your eligibility in order to get vaccinated, but individual vaccination providers appear to be asking for proof of eligibility, such as a work ID or paystub. Thus, we suggest planning ahead and being prepared to “prove” your eligibility, either when you schedule your appointment or at the time of vaccination.

Q: I am eligible for vaccination during Phase 1A because I am an unpaid caregiver. How can I prove my eligibility in order to get vaccinated?

A: DOH and the Department of Human Services (DHS) has stated that unpaid caregivers of a person with a disability qualify for vaccination during Phase 1A. They suggest such caregivers print out a copy of a letter, found on DHS’s website, and provide it to vaccine providers to establish their eligibility. It can be found on the bottom of this page, by checking the box indicating that someone is an unpaid caregiver:

When scheduling online appointments, you may be asked to select the basis on which you qualify for vaccination during phase 1A. If the online scheduler does not list “unpaid caregiver” as an option, select “healthcare worker.” If further details are required, such as what type of healthcare worker you are, and none of the listed categories seem to apply to you, select “other.”
**Q:** I am currently eligible for vaccination, but I cannot find anywhere that has available appointments. What can I do?

**A:** Unfortunately, there is no easy solution to this problem; demand for the vaccine currently outpaces supply. Until that changes, your best option is to be persistent: contact vaccine providers every day, either through email, online scheduling portals, or over the phone, and inquire about available appointments.

- DOH updates its interactive provider map every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, so you should plan to check the map for updates on those days, and see if there are new providers to add to your list of places to contact.

**Q:** I believe I should qualify for a vaccine now, because I have a medical condition that puts me at risk if I contract COVID-19. However, my condition is not one of those listed as being eligible for Phase 1A vaccination. Can I still get vaccinated now?

**A:** Probably not. As of right now, Pennsylvania is following the guidance from the Centers for Disease Control to prioritize those most at risk for COVID infections. People with increased risk of severe illness between the ages of 16 and 64 can be vaccinated in Phase 1A. Those conditions are limited to:

- Persons ages 16-64 with high-risk conditions:
  - Cancer
  - Chronic kidney disease
  - COPD
  - Down Syndrome
  - Heart conditions, such as heart failure, coronary artery disease, or cardiomyopathies
  - Immunocompromised state (weakened immune system) from solid organ transplant or from blood or bone marrow transplant, immune deficiencies, HIV, use of corticosteroids, or use of other immune weakening medicines
  - Obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 30 kg/m2 or higher but < 40 kg/m2)
  - Severe Obesity (BMI \(\geq 40\) kg/m2)
  - Pregnancy
  - Sickle cell disease
  - Smoking
  - Type 2 diabetes mellitus

However, the CDC has stated that “[a]s COVID-19 vaccines become more widely available in providers’ offices and pharmacies, healthcare providers may use clinical judgement to determine an individual patient’s priority for vaccination.”
Thus, it is possible that someone with a combination of risk factors for moderate disease might be deemed to qualify for vaccination during Phase 1A, if there are sufficient doses available. Therefore, when access to the vaccine increases, we advise speaking to your doctor to determine your eligibility.

**Q: I qualify for vaccination now, but I do not have reliable access to the internet. How can I secure an appointment without it?**

**A:** While it is more difficult to search for and schedule a vaccination appointment without internet access, it is not impossible. All vaccine providers are now required to have a phone line, staffed by a live person, that can be called to schedule vaccine appointments. However, it can be difficult to find the scheduling phone numbers without going online. Some providers announced they will only staff their phone line if and when they have available appointments. Therefore, we suggest that people without internet access call DOH’s hotline, 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258) to speak with someone who can help them locate vaccine providers and give them provider contact information.

PA Link, which helps connect seniors and adults with disabilities with needed supports, is also assisting people who do not have access to the internet, and connecting them with a dedicated “scheduling team.” For callers with transportation needs, PA Link can also connect them with their local Area Agency on Aging to assist with coordinating rides. The PA Link vaccine appointment hotline is 1-800-753-8827.

People who are enrolled in Pennsylvania’s prescription assistance program for older adults, PACE, can also reach out to PACE for help scheduling a vaccine appointment. PACE has launched a dedicated unit at its call center to help cardholders arrange vaccination appointments. Operators will also work with cardholders to arrange for transportation to vaccination sites, and can work with PACE’s pharmacy network members to provide vaccination at a cardholder’s residence, if necessary. Enrollees can call 1-800-225-7223.

People who are patients of a large health system may also be contacted directly by their medical provider with an invitation to schedule an appointment.

While all vaccine providers must now offer the option of scheduling over the phone, the vast majority of appointments, particularly those offered through pharmacies, appear to be posted (and quickly scheduled by someone seeking a vaccine) online. For this reason, we would suggest asking a trusted friend or family member with internet access to assist you in securing an appointment.
Q: I was able to schedule an appointment, but the location is not accessible to me. What can I do?

A: First, DO NOT cancel your appointment. Given the scarcity of appointments, it is possible you may find yourself with an appointment at a location that you cannot physically access. However, if you elect to cancel, you may not be able to get another appointment. Thus, we suggest advocating for yourself.

Vaccination providers are required to make reasonable accommodations to their established practices and procedures in order to provide people with disabilities with the vaccine. Such an accommodation might include offering you a curbside shot, meaning someone would meet you outside and vaccinate you, or meeting you in an alternate area of the building.

We suggest contacting the provider ahead of time, explaining your need for accommodation, and asking how they can accommodate you. If you run into problems getting a needed accommodation, call our intake line for assistance at 1-800-692-7443 x 400.

Q: I have an appointment at a mass vaccination clinic but I cannot wait in line. What can I do?

A: You have the right to a reasonable accommodation. If possible, call the vaccination clinic in advance of your appointment to let them know of your needs, and your requested accommodation (e.g. a chair to sit in, moving to the front of the line). If you cannot reach them, ask for the accommodation as soon as you arrive at your appointment. If you run into any difficulty getting an accommodation, call our intake line for assistance.

Q: I was able to get my first dose of the Moderna vaccine, but my second dose appointment has been cancelled due to a supply shortage. Should I try to find a different provider to administer my second dose?

A: No. Due to supply issues, some vaccine providers have had to cancel second dose appointments for the Moderna vaccine, and they may have yet to reschedule the appointments for a later date. DOH instructed providers to give patients the second Moderna dose within 42 days of their first shot. According to DOH guidelines, patients are supposed to get both the first and second dose of the vaccine from the same provider.

Therefore, the provider should contact you within that 42-day window to arrange for a second dose. If they do not do so, we would suggest reporting this to DOH so that they can address the problem. We would also suggest reaching out to the provider directly to advocate for yourself.

Some providers are scheduling standalone second dose appointments, but this practice does not appear to be common.
Q: I cannot leave my home but would like to get vaccinated. What are my options?

A: As of this time, we do not know of any mobile vaccination clinics that are up and running. However, we know that DOH recognizes the need for such clinics, and has included them as part of its vaccination plan. Therefore, we would suggest regularly checking DOH’s website and interactive provider map for updates.

People enrolled in PACE can call 1-800-225-7223 and request to be scheduled for a vaccination at home.

Q: In order to get vaccinated, I need transportation, and I do not have access to public transportation or do not feel safe using it during the pandemic. What can I do?

A: At this time, we do not know of any established program to address this need. However, both Uber and Lyft are advocating for government funded rides to vaccination appointments, and the Biden administration is said to be interested in creating such a program. We would suggest regularly checking the Uber and Lyft websites and apps to see when/if these “free” ride share programs become active.

Pennsylvania also operates a Persons with Disabilities program, where people with disabilities who are 18 through 64 may receive reduced rates on shared-ride, curb-to-curb, advance reservation transportation services. For people who are 65 and older, the Pennsylvania Department of Aging offers alternative transportation options. If you are having trouble organizing transportation to a vaccination appointment, please contact our intake line for assistance.

Q: Can I get vaccinated in a different county than where I live?

A: Yes. There is no requirement that you get vaccinated in the same county in which you live. However, individual vaccine providers may have different eligibility requirements (e.g. a vaccine clinic sponsored by an individual county might limit their doses to county residents). Thus, it is important to check with vaccine providers to ensure your eligibility before scheduling an appointment.

Q: My 16 or 17 year-old child is eligible for vaccination during Phase 1A because (s)he has a qualifying pre-existing condition. Only the Pfizer vaccine is approved for children. How can I make sure I get my child an appointment at a provider that is giving out the Pfizer vaccine?

A: While most providers are getting only one type of vaccine to distribute, some providers get multiple types per week (e.g. both Pfizer and Moderna). Therefore, we would suggest you take a few steps to ensure your child is scheduled for an appointment for the Pfizer vaccine. First, refer to Pennsylvania’s “Vaccine Distribution” page, which is updated throughout the week.
Here, you can look at different spreadsheets to figure out which vaccine(s) doses have been allocated to individual providers for that week. Next, we suggest calling the provider directly to confirm which vaccine they will be offering on the day of your appointment.

Certain vaccine providers, mainly health systems that serve a pediatric population, such as CHOP in the Philadelphia area, are focusing their vaccination efforts on children who qualify for vaccination during phase 1A. As a result, these providers are likely to have Pfizer vaccine doses.

**Q: I have put my name on a waitlist for vaccine, or filled out an interest survey through a provider. How will I know when it is my turn to get vaccinated?**

**A:** Different providers are notifying people differently, and many are giving little to no notice to people when appointments become available (e.g. a vaccination clinic might call you in the afternoon with an invitation to get vaccinated that same day). Some providers are sending email notifications with scheduling links, while others are contacting people over the phone. For providers that are using the phone, it can be difficult to predict what number the call will come from, as many providers appear to be relying on volunteers who are using their personal cell phones to make these outreach calls.

If you have registered for a vaccine through your local government, such as a municipal or county department of health, until you have been vaccinated, we strongly recommend you answer all calls from unknown numbers, as such a call might be your invitation to come to a vaccination clinic.

**Q: If I don’t want to or can’t spend my time making phone calls or scouring the internet for a vaccine appointment, is there any way to put myself on a list for “extra” vaccine leftover at the end of the day?**

Maybe. Some providers are maintaining lists of people to contact in the event of leftover doses. Others are publicizing any extra doses they have on social media, and giving them out on a "first come, first served" basis. If you have a vaccine provider local to you that you would be able to get to quickly, it may be worth inquiring about whether they are maintaining a list for “extra” walk-in appointments.

**Q: Is there any cost associated with the vaccine? Can I get vaccinated if I do not have health insurance?**

**A:** The vaccine is being offered to all Americans free of charge, and you do not need to be insured in order to get vaccinated. However, vaccine providers may ask for your health insurance information when you register for an appointment, but you should still be able to schedule the appointment if you are uninsured.
If you need more information or need help, please contact Disability Rights Pennsylvania (DRP) at 800-692-7443 (voice) or 877-375-7139 (TTY), or email us at intake@disabilityrightspa.org.

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