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Dear Local Health Colleague:

I am writing to update you with important information about the state's effort regarding vaccination distribution, where demand vastly exceeds current supply. The Baker-Polito Administration is committed to the effective, efficient and equitable administration of vaccines throughout the state. According to the CDC, Massachusetts, on February 16, was #9 in the U.S. for vaccinations per capita (1st doses/capita). Massachusetts was #1 for total shots administered per capita (this past week) amongst the 24 states with at least 5M people, according to Bloomberg. As of Monday, more than 251,000 of our residents ages 75 or older have received their 1st dose. This represents 51% of the statewide population, exceeding the national average of 47% of residents 75+ that have received their first dose.

First and foremost, I want to acknowledge your incredible efforts throughout the pandemic. Local health departments, community health centers, regional collaboratives, hospitals, large health systems and others quickly ramped up their capacity to provide vaccinations. Many local boards of health stepped up to vaccinate first responders and some continued to vaccinate individuals eligible in Phase 1 and those age 75 and older. The Baker-Polito Administration is deeply thankful for municipal collaboration in the early, targeted steps of the vaccination effort.

Today, Governor Baker and Lieutenant Governor Polito will announce that effective tomorrow, February 18th, individuals age 65 or older, individuals with two or more specific medical conditions, listed [here](#), and residents and staff of public and private low income and affordable senior housing are eligible to receive this vaccine. With this announcement, 1 million individuals will become eligible for the vaccine.

Streamlined Vaccination Distribution

As the Commonwealth moves forward and as a million residents become eligible, the Administration must streamline the vaccine distribution process in anticipation of this challenge and within the confines of limited vaccine supply provided by the federal government. The Commonwealth has been receiving approximately 110,000 new first doses each week.

High-capacity throughput vaccination, available across the Commonwealth, is important to ensuring vaccines do not sit idle. To avoid confusion and increase access, vaccination locations must be available to all residents and not narrowly restricted by geography. Currently, almost 95% of our population lives within a 45-minute drive of a mass vaccination site or within 30 minutes of a regional site. This is in addition to the growing number of pharmacies and other retail locations administering doses, currently numbered at 105.

Equity

In addition to increasing efficiency in administering the vaccine, the Commonwealth must ensure that the program is equitable and meets the needs of communities that have been most disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Utilizing the social vulnerability index as a starting point, the Department of Public Health has identified 20 municipalities that have had the greatest COVID burden and have the greatest percentage of non- white residents. These municipalities are: Boston; Brockton; Chelsea; Everett; Fall River; Fitchburg; Framingham; Haverhill; Holyoke; Lawrence; Leominster; Lowell; Lynn; Malden; Methuen; New Bedford; Randolph; Revere; Springfield; and Worcester.

Public Health Commissioner Monica Bharel has reached out to these municipal leaders to assist with [increasing awareness](#), to address vaccine hesitancy and to mitigate barriers to vaccine access. These municipalities will continue to distribute vaccine at the local level, are prioritized for the retail pharmacy program, and are served by community health centers, hospitals and other health care providers administering vaccine in the community.

Serving the most vulnerable

The Commonwealth is fortunate that so many local public health officials want to help vaccinate their residents. Given the constraints on vaccine supply, the Administration is asking our local officials to focus efforts around outreach to vulnerable, hard to reach populations, including homebound seniors, individuals who participate in ‘meals on wheels’ and others who are eligible but not able to travel to a vaccine site. Local officials are more adept at identifying and meeting these high need populations and can arrange for them to be vaccinated either by the local board of health, connect them to community providers or refer to the State’s vaccination program for homebound individuals, which will launch in the coming weeks.

Regional Collaboration

Additionally, municipalities may propose regional collaborations that meet specific geographic needs identified by the state and must meet specific requirements including:

- Have the capacity to vaccinate minimally 750 individuals per day, 5 days per week;
- Serve unmet need geographically, as identified by the Department of Public Health;
- Meet an administration rate threshold of 85% and report doses within 24 hours;
- Serve all residents of the Commonwealth; collaborations may focus outreach efforts towards those who live or work in the area but must be open to all Massachusetts residents; and
- Provide public links for vaccine appointments on [Mass.gov/COVIDVaccine](https://www.mass.gov/COVIDVaccine).

Other important ways for municipalities to engage in the Commonwealth's vaccine program include:

- Promote vaccine acceptance by establishing COVID ambassador programs, providing tele-townhalls or developing messaging campaigns in multiple languages;
- Encourage and assist residents to utilize mass vaccination sites and retail pharmacies for vaccination;
- [Plan](#), develop or coordinate vaccine programs for residents living in public and private low income and affordable senior housing; or
- Identify, plan and organize vaccination of homebound residents who are unable to access any other vaccination program as they become eligible.

Effective the week of March 1st, the state will no longer provide first dose vaccines for individual municipal clinics, except for the twenty disproportionately impacted communities and established and approved Regional Collaboratives. Municipalities will receive second doses to ensure that all residents have been fully vaccinated by individual local board of health clinics.

On Friday, February 19th, at 9 am, the Department of Public Health will hold a webinar for local boards of health to review the opportunities to distribute vaccine as outlined above. The Department will answer questions and provide a specific how-to-guide for municipalities to reach the most vulnerable residents.

This is a shared responsibility and herculean effort to offer safe and effective vaccines to millions of Massachusetts residents. Working together, state and local government along with our health care partners can meet this challenge and ensure that every Massachusetts resident will have the opportunity to be vaccinated.

Sincerely,



Marylou Sudders