


TO: Chairman Donald Wagner, Supervisor, Third District and Honorable Members Board of Supervisors

FROM: Debra Baetz, MBA, Interim Agency Director   
Mindy Winterswyk, PT, DPT, PCS, Assistant Agency Director

DATE: October 13, 2023

RE: HCA PHS Role - COVID-19 Vaccines and Tests

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The OC Health Care Agency (HCA) County Health Officer and Chief of Public Health Services is providing your Honorable Board clarification on HCA's current role with updated COVID-19 vaccines and COVID tests.

According to [CDC's respiratory disease season outlook dated September 14, 2023](#), the CDC "expects this year will be similar to last year in terms of the total number of hospitalizations from COVID-19, RSV, and Flu. As with last year, the total number of hospitalizations this year is expected to be higher than what we as a nation experienced prior to the COVID-19 pandemic."

With the end of the State of Public Health Emergency for COVID-19, Local Health Jurisdictions, including the HCA, no longer receive COVID-19 vaccines at no-cost for broad public use. Vaccines received at no-cost are limited and restricted for administration to a select population.

With COVID-19 continuing to affect the community, preventive measures and mitigation strategies are strongly recommended. Vaccines and testing also continue to play an important role.

### **HCA and COVID-19 Vaccine**

- With the commercialization of the updated COVID-19 vaccine and the end of the State of Emergency for COVID-19, the HCA is focusing its COVID-19 vaccination efforts to serve specific high-risk populations who may have difficulty accessing vaccination, including the homebound and persons experiencing homelessness.
- Our Public Health Services Family Health Clinic at the 17<sup>th</sup> Street clinic is a Bridge Access Program and Vaccine for Children (VFC) provider and plans to offer COVID-19 vaccine for eligible adults and children depending on availability of COVID-19 vaccine supply received through the BAP and VFC programs.
- To date, our Public Health Services Family Health Clinic has received a limited supply of the updated COVID-19 vaccine for adults through the Bridge Access Program and intends to

open appointments. The clinic anticipates receipt of VFC supplied COVID-19 vaccines for eligible children in October.

### **How to Access COVID-19 Vaccines**

- Health care providers, including pharmacies, can order vaccine directly from the manufacturers. Those who ordered the updated 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccines directly from the manufacturers are expected to receive shipments in the upcoming week if they have not already received it late last week.
- Patients with insurance should reach out to their usual provider or pharmacy to find out if or when they will have the updated 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccines available.
- The federal Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program which provides vaccines to children who are served by Medicaid or are under or uninsured will be supplying updated 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccines to these children. Parents should reach out to their child's provider to find out the timing of availability.
- For uninsured and underinsured adults, the CDC has created the [Bridge Access Program](#) (BAP) so that uninsured people will continue to have access to no-cost vaccine. BAP vaccine will be available through the HCA, federally supported health centers (FQHC's), as well as commercial pharmacies that have contracted to participate. Currently, this includes all CVS and Walgreens pharmacies, but additional pharmacies are expected to join.
- The [www.Vaccines.gov](http://www.Vaccines.gov) website is expected to be updated with COVID-19 vaccine availability as the vaccine is distributed to pharmacies and clinics. Uninsured and insured individuals can find available appointments through this website.
- With the commercialization of COVID-19 vaccines, while federal rules require insurers to cover the updated 2023-2024 COVID vaccine, residents are advised to understand their insurance plan and how to gain coverage of the updated COVID-19 vaccine.

### **COVID-19 Tests**

- At-Home COVID-19 Test Kits from the State
  - The State continues to offer over-the-counter (OTC) COVID-19 test kits to organizations and local health jurisdictions for certain populations and plans to transition from direct distribution to local organizations such as schools and community organizations to distribution solely to local health jurisdictions by December 1, 2023.
  - At-Home test kits provided by the state are meant for "Eligible participants are those that are uninsured, underinsured, or have poor access to medical care, or those at high risk of severe illness (immunocompromised, those over >65 years)." This includes congregate settings, such as skilled nursing facilities, homeless shelters, and even

schools. Tests kits from the State are **not** available for those with insurance, including government employees and entities that don't fit the above criteria.

- HCA has been ordering test kits and redistributing to at-risk groups- including congregate settings, skilled nursing facilities and homeless shelters and schools over the last few years and intends to continue this as the state transitions to distributing solely to local health jurisdictions.
- As of September 25, 2023 the Federal Government is offering four free at-home COVID-19 tests for US households. Each household can place an order at: <https://www.covid.gov/tests>.
- Uninsured individuals can find no-cost COVID-19 testing at the following website: <https://testinglocator.cdc.gov/>

### **COVID-19 Therapeutics and Treatment**

- Receiving treatment can reduce severity and duration of symptoms for those with COVID-19 and can additionally reduce the risk of long COVID-19.
- Long Term Care (LTC) Residents, older adults, as well as individuals with multiple medical conditions or those who are immunosuppressed are at highest risk for severe illness even if they are vaccinated or boosted. The state is encouraging providers to improve therapeutic access in congregate settings to reduce the severity of illness in this population.
- COVID-19 treatments are currently widely available. Residents who test positive are encouraged to seek medical attention to discuss with a provider to consider treatment.
- The Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Strategic Preparedness and response has developed a website to assist individuals find locations that received federally funded treatment. <https://covid-19-therapeutics-locator-dhhs.hub.arcgis.com/>
- As products become commercially available, manufacturers will ensure that people who are uninsured or underinsured will continue to have access through their respective patient assistance programs to provide COVID-19 therapeutics free of charge to eligible patients.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Regina Chinsio-Kwong, at (714) 834-2729 or [rchinsiokwong@ochca.com](mailto:rchinsiokwong@ochca.com).

cc: Frank Kim, County Executive Officer

RS:RCK