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**Public Health Prioritizing Vaccination**

Testing availability may be limited during vaccine rollout

 **VALDOSTA –** As COVID-19 vaccine begins being given in our communities, public health staff will be focusing their efforts on distributing vaccines as quickly as possible.

 With the focus of public health shifting to vaccine distribution, this will mean limited testing appointment availability at public health sites.

 With the vaccination schedule, public health staff will continue to follow the tiered phases set out by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. This means that for the initial launch, or tier 1A, public health will be vaccinating healthcare workers. Tier 1B is currently expected to include first responders, education workers, essential workers and individuals over 75. Based on current guidance, the tiers then move into those will compromised immune systems, those living in congregate settings and then into the general public.

 Moving through the tiers will occur as quickly as possible, but there is a chance that it could still be a couple of months before the general public is able to be vaccinated.

 As South Health District moves through each tier, updates will be posted daily on the SHD website ([www.southhealthdistrict.com](http://www.southhealthdistrict.com)/covid19), social media pages and through local media groups.

 “We know that in order to slow the spread of COVID-19 and to get through this pandemic, we must vaccinate as many people as possible as quickly as possible. We understand that testing still needs to be a priority for our staff, however our staff must focus their efforts on vaccine distribution as much as possible,” said William R. Grow, MD, FACP, district health director. “Please understand that vaccination, in addition to mask wearing, social distancing and hand washing are the best tools we have to overcome this pandemic. With that in mind, we want to make every effort to get through these vaccine tiers as quickly as possible.”

 The Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) wants to remind everyone of the importance of continuing precautions.

**Practice social distancing** – keep at least 6 feet between yourself and other people.

**Wash your hands** – use soap and water and scrub for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (60% alcohol) if soap and water aren’t readily available.

**Wear a mask –** The CDC recommends the use of face masks or simple cloth face coverings to help slow the spread of COVID-19, especially where social distancing is difficult to maintain (grocery stores, pharmacies, etc.).

**Answer the call** -  If you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, public health will call you and ask you to self-quarantine at home for 14 days from the day that you were exposed. Do your part to keep your family and your community safe: answer the call to slow the spread.

**Get your flu shot ­-** Due to the similarities between flu and COVID, it is more important this year than ever to get your flu shot. Every individual over the age of six months should get a flu vaccine – not just for their own protection, but to protect others around them who may be more vulnerable to the flu and its complications.

Self-registration for COVID testing is available online at covid19.dph.ga.gov.

 For the most up-to-date information on Covid-19 vaccination, testing schedules, and public health’s response within our district, please visit our website [www.southhealthdistrict.com](http://www.southhealthdistrict.com)/covid19. We will also post all updates to our social media accounts and we encourage everyone to like and/or follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

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