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Public Health prepared for COVID-19 vaccine release

VALDOSTA – The Georgia Department of Public Health’s South Health District is working diligently to prepare for the arrival and distribution of COVID-19 vaccine.

While the exact arrival date for the vaccine has yet to be determined (as of December 9, 2020), the staff within South Health District are ready to begin distribution as soon as that date is finalized, and we receive our first allotment of vaccine.

Nationwide the allotment of vaccine will be limited initially. With the uncertain amount of vaccine that will be available at the launch, South Health District does not know currently how many vaccines we will receive in our initial allotment.

Due to this limited supply, when a COVID-19 vaccine is authorized by FDA and recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), distribution of the COVID-19 vaccination will follow the tiered approach recommended by the ACIP. This will help ensure that those considered the highest risk have first access to the vaccine.

“South Health District has plans in place that will allow us to open vaccination sites at a few or all of our health departments as well as various other locations throughout the district if needed,” said District Health Director Dr. William R. Grow, MD, FACP. “Our clinical and emergency preparedness staff have been working closely to ensure that, once vaccine sites are able to open, the process of getting a vaccine will be as smooth as possible for the residents of our district.”

Distribution of the vaccine within our 10 counties will occur not only through public health, but also through select private providers such as area hospitals. Select providers within our district have registered as distribution sites, while others have not. It is recommended that each individual contact their private provider to see if they are providing vaccine before arriving for vaccination.

Georgia DPH, in collaboration with other agencies such as GEMA, Office of the Fire and Insurance Commissioner, Department of Community Health, Department of Behavioral Health and Disability, are working closely together to ensure that the distribution efforts are executed as quickly and smoothly as possible.

The Georgia Department of Public Health 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.

Free COVID-19 testing continues to be available in all 10 counties across the Georgia Department of Public Health's South Health District. The South Health District includes Ben Hill, Berrien, Brooks, Cook, Echols, Irwin, Lanier, Lowndes, Tift and Turner Counties.

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

For the most up-to-date information on Covid-19 vaccination and public health's response within our district, please visit our website www.southhealthdistrict.com. 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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