

Congressman Dutch Ruppersberger Access Live Event
February 03, 2021

Jaime Lennon:

Good evening, and welcome to Congressman Dutch Ruppersberger's telephone town hall. My name is Jamie Lennon, I'm Congressman Ruppersberger's Director of Communications, and I will be moderating tonight's call. Thanks for taking the time to join us tonight. We hope you find this call informative. This is Congressman Ruppersberger's third town hall meeting focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic. Tonight, we will focus on the ongoing efforts to distribute the COVID-19 vaccine. In a moment, I'll turn the phone over to Congressman Ruppersberger, but first I want to explain the format for tonight's call. If you would like to ask a question, just press star three on your phone and you'll be connected with a staff person who will take your question and get you into the queue to speak directly with Congressman Ruppersberger or our featured guests.

Jaime Lennon:

Due to the high volume of questions, we will not be able to get to all of your questions over the next hour. In order to reach as many as possible, we ask participants to limit their questions to one each. We are also limiting questions to those pertaining exclusively to the vaccination effort at this time. Again, press star three if you'd like to ask a question. Congressman Ruppersberger.

Congressman Ruppersberger:

Good evening, and thank you so much for joining us tonight. My name is Dutch Ruppersberger and I'm proud to be your representative. Nothing is more important to me than the health and wellbeing of my constituents. As you know, the Coronavirus continues to spread at an alarming rate. We have lost cherish loved ones, many of our favorite local businesses have closed, and most of our children have not returned to their classrooms. The pandemic is far from over and while we now have two highly successful vaccines in our toolbox, the hard work of getting Marylanders vaccinated begins. I've heard from many constituents who are worried about the safety of the vaccine itself. I've heard from constituents who are confused about the process and frustrated by the long wait for a shot. I understand your concerns and frustrations [inaudible 00:02:10] congressional delegation has been fighting for resources to first develop the vaccines and now deploy them across the country.

Congressman Ruppersberger:

We will continue to do whatever we can to help the new president, so administrations to boost the federal supply and streamline its deployment. Meanwhile, our state and local governments have been tasked with a massive responsibility and I mean massive responsibility of actually getting the vaccine to the American people. Many of you know I come from local government, that's where the rubber meets the road. I understand that you need to understand this is a huge undertaking and our state and local governments are already hurting for resources. They're already strapped, but it's not a secret that Maryland is falling behind other states in vaccine distribution, and we must do better and we will. We need a more effective strategy and we need clearer and more accessible information. That is what this town hall meeting is all about. We're not here to point fingers, but to exchange information as we have it, and as best we can.

Congressman Ruppersberger:

For that reason, I have several guests joining us tonight. Joining us from the State of Maryland, we have Dr. Jinlene Chan, acting deputy director for Public Health Services. We also have Steve McAdams who is executive director of Governor Hogan Office of Community Initiatives. And we thank Governor Hogan for having these individuals with us tonight. Steve and Dr. Chan, I know you're both incredibly busy and

I'm grateful you made time to join with us tonight. Dr. Chan, do you want to say a few words before we start and then we'll go to Steve?

Jinline Chan:

Yes. Thank you. Can you hear him, sir?

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Yes, we can.

Jinline Chan:

Great. Thank you. Good evening. And thank you, Congressman Ruppertsberger and to all who are on the line who joined us this evening and as all of you know who live in Maryland, we have been working tirelessly around the clock really since about a year ago, it's hard to believe that it's been nearly a year since Governor Hogan first declare that we had our very first case of COVID-19 in the state, that was March 5th, which is about a month from now and since then Maryland really has been working tirelessly, and I will say my colleagues at the Maryland Department of Health, as well as local health departments, I also come from working at the local level really have been at the front lines of our response efforts in providing PPE to contact tracing, standing up testing sites around the state and making resources available for our most vulnerable population.

Jinline Chan:

Vaccinations is another aspect of our cohesive response effort and the support that has been provided not only from the governor's office, but also at the federal level is appreciated. And there are additional resources that have been recently provided that will allow us to do more. And at this point in time, Maryland I believe has actually been relatively successful in vaccinating, we have used 70% of the doses that have been provided to us, that are our first doses and we continue to ramp up our efforts. So I look forward to speaking with you and I turn it back to you Congressman.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Well, thank you very much. And also from the governor's office, Dr. Steve McAdams. [inaudible 00:05:50] Dr. Steve. I gave you a page-

Steve McAdams:

Good evening, Congressman. How are you doing? Can you hear me?

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Very well.

Steve McAdams:

Can you hear me [crosstalk 00:05:58] Okay, great. Good evening, everybody, My name is Steve McAdams and I'm the executive director of the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives. We are the arm of the governor who interacts with the communities, we represent and work with all of the ethnic commissions around the state, as well as the Governor's Office of Service and Volunteerism. And we have the Maryland African-American Museum with the Banneker-Douglass Museum.

Steve McAdams:

With that being said, our office is tasked with working on two different phases of the approach in directing and messaging with the vaccine. The first approach is, and we'd like to put everything in perspective for everybody that are currently, probably about half the population is knocking on the door wanting to get the vaccine. The second half will come a little bit later, once there's more vaccines available, then there are people in messaging to the safety, and also to the hard-to-reach communities [crosstalk 00:07:07] that don't have a faith in the process we'll be working to get the message and availability to those folks.

Steve McAdams:

But at the very early stage here, currently Maryland is receiving 1.74% less than 2% of all the doses that the federal government has on the weekly basis and being sent to us at which we are dispersing out through to all of the different health departments hospitals, CVS, Walgreens, and now we've added some retail partners. The total amount of shots that we are now getting vaccines that we're getting in a week is 88,000, we were getting 77,000 and these are our first shots. And this week, it uptick to 88,000, we do have a commitment from the federal government to receive an additional 88,000 over the next two weeks.

Steve McAdams:

We do believe, and we hope as the federal government hopes as maturation of the distribution and production of the vaccine ramps up, keep in mind, these vaccines were just approved in December and with the new product when it hits the market, typically there's a period where you get to build up your distribution chains of manufacturing, and then you may set a delivery and launch for the product nine or 10 months later. We actually needed these 300 million shots in the United States last spring. So the number one objective from the federal government on down, the president on down is to get to shot to arms as quickly as possible and not wait for the full maturation of distribution nine months later.

Steve McAdams:

So with that being said, each week, we do expect that we are in the process of building out the infrastructure in order when the additional vaccines get approved, or when the supply chain matures to the point where it's going to grow exponentially for what every state receives over the next two, three or four months, but there is no state to purchase the vaccine directly from the drug maker is all being directed through the federal government and the federal government, we put in requests for what we want and what we were asking for. And they shipped that directly to our distribution centers. Now, you may have had some issues where you have constituents who have signed up to get a shot, and they have been told that they can't come and receive at the last minute, and that is most likely because of the shipment that's provider received was less than what was promised to them through the supply chain.

Steve McAdams:

But the governor is very committed and he is advocating daily along with the federal delegation to provide more resources and vaccines to the state of Maryland. The simple fact is that nobody is holding these vaccines, nobody's holding them. As soon as they're getting produced, they're getting distributed right out to the states. So we are in the process of ramping up and building out the distribution center, which as the doses increase, we will be able to be in best position to receive more from the federal

government and be able to get them into the local communities as quickly as possible. Thank you, Congressman.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Thank you for that message. And we really appreciate both Dr. Chan and you being here. It's a team effort, federal state, and local, it's a massive effort throughout the whole country, but we're focused on the state of Maryland, and we're going to make it right, believe me. I also understand many of you still have questions about the vaccine itself and if it's right for you and your family, also joining us to answer those questions, we have Dr. Kawsar Talaat of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and Dr. Talaat is a respected infectious disease expert and vaccine researcher at Johns Hopkins, who as I understand personally participated in the COVID-19 vaccine trials. Dr. Talaat, thank you first, for volunteering for that, and second, thank you for sharing your expertise with us tonight. Is there anything you'd like to say before we get started, Dr. Talaat?

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

Thank you very much, Congressman Ruppertsberger. It is my great to be here tonight. And I think when you ask people who develop vaccines this time last year whether it would be possible to have a vaccine in under a year, we would have told you there was no way, but where there's a will there's a way. And through the efforts of a tremendous number of scientists and people who volunteered for the studies, we were able to have not one but two vaccines authorized for use and in high risk people, in under a year, and I think it's really amazing and the vaccines are terrific, and I'm happy to answer any questions about them.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

I thank you for that. And as I mentioned earlier, the counties through Maryland have been given latitude to deploy vaccines up to their respective populations. And for that reason, we have some representatives from several of our county health departments on the line to answer any county specific questions. We have several representatives from Harford County Health Department joining us, including Marcy Austin, and she's deputy health officer. Also joining us from Baltimore County, we have Dr. Alexander Chen, chief of communicable diseases. We also have Pamela Jordan, deputy chief administrative officer for health and human services at Renault County. And we also have deputy health officer, Toni Gedin from Anne Arundel County on the line as well. Pamela and Toni, it's great to have you, thank you so much for being here. Now, it's my understanding there are several local elected officials on the line, we have from Harford County, Councilman Andre Johnson and Baltimore City, Council President Nick Mosby with us. I thank you all for being here. Thank you both. And please feel free to chime in.

Speaker 6:

[crosstalk 00:13:38]

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Thank you for being here again. So, Tami [inaudible 00:13:43] from ARP, Maryland is also on the line. I thank you, Tami, for being here and all of the work ARP does for Maryland seniors, especially those dealing with the pandemic. I think we're ready to get started now, Jamie.

Speaker 6:

[inaudible 00:13:58]

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

And Jaime, your show.

Speaker 6:

[inaudible 00:14:00]

Jaime Lennon:

Yeah, if you already have [inaudible 00:14:03] ready to begin. Just one more reminder to please press star six at any time to sign up for Congressman Ruppertsberger newsletter, which is a great way to stay informed as the Coronavirus situation evolves. Let's go ahead and take our first question, it's coming from Melinda Lipscomb. Melinda, if you could just identify for everybody where you're calling from, and then go ahead with your question.

Melinda Lipscomb:

Sure. I'm calling from Rosedale in Baltimore County, and my question is as a home-bound disabled at-risk person under the age of 65, is there any plan for getting the vaccine at home to those of us that are disabled and live on our own?

Jaime Lennon:

Steve, do you want to take [inaudible 00:14:53] is that's something you might be able to speak to?

Steve McAdams:

Yes. We are in the process of developing additional phases for disabled and elderly folks who are non-congregate settings. So there will be coming additional subgroups within the outlays as we move forward. So we've heard, and as we move forward and we discovered groups of people who cannot either get to and get a vaccine in the present format that it is, we're listening, we're hearing, and we will do things to adapt and make sure that we get that addressed with the local health departments.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Okay, thank you. Next question.

Jaime Lennon:

Sure. The next question is coming from Mary Kook of Baltimore. Mary, you're live.

Mary Kook:

Good evening, Congressman and respected doctors. My name is Mary Kook, and I appreciate all of the many things that the doctors have reiterated that have been going on to help Marylanders, but I would specifically like to address the problems that are still out there and are not being addressed. Congressman, you mentioned earlier that CVS is giving out vaccines, I have not found that to be true, and as of about five minutes ago, I went on the CBS website and it specifically states that no vaccines are available in Maryland.

Mary Kook:

I live in Baltimore County and Baltimore County's website says that they are not distributing one C-vaccines at this time. So those Marylanders who are 65 and over, many of whom are the most vulnerable. Yesterday, I happened to have the not so good luck of being kicked off of the Baltimore City website, and Baltimore City vaccine site, along with many, many other people who had confirmations and was just unilaterally changed from a day one vaccine to day two vaccine. Also Ocean City, I have property in Ocean City and I tried to register in Ocean City, and even though the COVID site says go within a 50 mile radius, I do live in Ocean City part of the year. So I tried to get on in Ocean City and I don't live there full time, but I do pay taxes there, but apparently I can't get a vaccine there. Where can we get vaccine?

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Let me try to answer that the best way I can straight from the information that I've received. Firstly, the Biden administration is looking how to test the effect of shipping vaccines directly to pharmacies and expanding access in the neighborhoods. And they're calling this a Federal Pharmacy Partnership. [inaudible 00:17:56] at 6,500 pharmacies across the nation, including some CVS, Walgreens, Rite Aid, Walmart, Costco, and others will soon have vaccines available to administer.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Now in Maryland, there are 18 CVS pharmacies that will begin to administer COVID-19 vaccines to eligible populations, which will be in accordance with Maryland's phased approach. And in order for an individual to receive a vaccine, they need to register and book their own appointment with CVS, which you've said you've done, but as this program rolls out, those doses will still be limited. And in early weeks of the program, pharmacies in Maryland are expected to receive only about 11,000 vaccine doses based on what information we have at this point. Now once more supply becomes available and if the program is effective, we expect more locations will open up.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

And I will say this, that there are more coming aboard, there's more certification, and the more that we have, the better it's going to be, but the reason you don't have the CVS or Walgreens ready, they haven't received it. And that's what we're trying to work on and we want to hear that right now. Do you have anything else you want to add on that issue? I guess you're not on. Anybody else who want to take that question or do you think [crosstalk 00:19:32]

Speaker 10:

Congressman Ruppertsberger, Steve McAdams, and I'd like to second the Congressman's comments in regards to that the distribution chain is being built out with the anticipation that the vaccine distribution and production is going to grow expeditiously over the next six, eight, 12 weeks. And yes, there is a very big waiting list for one V, one C, there's 2 million people that are available for the vaccine in the State of Maryland in one A, B and C combined, and we are receiving approximately 88,000 of vaccines a week. So that will ramp up at the beginning of the year. We were below 10,000 vaccines and it's greatly ramping up right now and it will ramp up further, but as you get registered that does not necessarily mean that you're going to be able to get a vaccine right away.

Speaker 10:

What that means is that you will be placed on the providers list, and as they get the vaccine in they will be going through the list in the order. But it will accelerate and we do need to send doses to the

pharmacy because they will be able to test, run, build out so that they can handle immense supply coming in. Thank you.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Okay. Next question.

Jaime Lennon:

This question is coming from Sherry Jackson. Could you identify for everybody where you're calling from, Sherry? Sherry, you're live. Sherry, are you with us? Okay. Let's move on to Victor from Baltimore County, Victor you're live.

Victor:

[inaudible 00:21:31] all the respected doctors. Hi, Congressman and all the doctors and everybody. I'm 56, I'm not quite elderly yet, and all through the pandemic they were worrying people who had diabetes, heart disease, they got everything like that to be extra vigilant, which I have been a bit lucky so far, but when does somebody like myself going to be able to get a vaccine?

Jinline Chan:

Colleagues, this is Dr. Chan. So, we believe that, again, this is about a vaccine supply issue for not just Maryland, but across the country. People with underlying conditions are right now prioritize in phase two, and we are still working through [inaudible 00:22:27] A1 through C and we can but even people who are vaccinated, we still highly suggest and encourage that all of the precautions that you have been taking continued to be taken such as wearing masks and avoiding large gatherings and hand washing, all of those things are still very important, even after a vaccination.

Jaime Lennon:

Okay. Thank you. Next question is coming from one of our online listeners, Ted asks, "Why is Maryland in phase one C haven't finished 1A or 1B?"

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Steve, can you answer that?

Steve McAdams:

Yes, I can. There's several reasons for it. First, both the Trump and Biden administration have encouraged the state to move into 1C as well as we received a request from all eight Central Maryland County executives, which represents 84% of the population are also asked for the ability to move into 1C. In addition to that, it also has a layer of equality, because as you open it up to more people, it's going to be a more equitable distribution based on race and ethnicity. So, that's the reason why, and again the underlying problem is the supply chain and supply chain is still at the very early stages, but it will be ramping up, and we will be in good shape in three or four months as far as being able to get vaccines mass produced if not sooner, but that's the reason why.

Jaime Lennon:

Okay, thank you. Next we have Mike Connell. Mike, if you can let everyone know where you're calling from, we'd appreciate it. You're live.

Mike Connell:

Yes. I'm calling from [inaudible 00:24:37] County, just over the Baltimore City Line. Can you hear me okay?

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Good.

Mike Connell:

Okay. My question is how do you measure the success of the vaccines that's stopping COVID?

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Well, okay, it's a good question. I guess, Dr. Talaat, can you answer that question? Talaat?

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

Sure. I can try and maybe Dr. Chan can also answer it, but I think that what we're going to look for is, as we start ramping up the number of people who are vaccinated that provides protection to those people, so when they come into contact with somebody with COVID, they don't get sick, hopefully they won't spread it to anybody else. We don't know yet for sure how well the vaccines are going to prevent, somebody who has been vaccinated from spreading the virus, but we assume it will be much less. And so as more and more people are vaccinated then anybody who has the infection will have less ability to spread it and eventually the number of people with the infection will come down. And so what we'll see is more and more people are vaccinated is the number of cases of COVID that occur will start to decrease gradually with the vaccination.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Okay. Thank you.

Jaime Lennon:

Okay, Dr. Talaat, while we have you, this question is coming in from one of our Facebook listeners, is the one shot Johnson and Johnson vaccine safe for seniors or people with illnesses like pneumonia, or did they need the double vaccine from a Moderna and Pfizer?

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

So that's a really good question. With the data that Johnson and Johnson has recently published, not published, I believe last week, it looks like the vaccine is effective, but the immune response to the vaccine in seniors is lower than in younger adults. And Johnson is on center, actually doing another trial to look at two doses to if two doses, a booster dose in the future might be better than a single dose. Right now the Johnson and Johnson vaccine is not available, they have not yet filed for authorization to the FDA, and so the only two vaccines that are currently available are the Pfizer vaccine and the Moderna vaccines.

Jaime Lennon:

Okay. Thank you for that. The next question is coming from Franklin Marshall Fountain of Owing Mills, Franklin you're on the line.

Franklin Marshall Fountain:

Thank you for taking my question. The previous caller pretty much answered my question, and I thank you for your service, and please continue to do your good work.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Thank you for that. Okay.

Jaime Lennon:

Thank you, Franklin.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Thank you, Franklin.

Jaime Lennon:

Okay. Let's take a question from Dennis. Dennis, if you could identify to everybody where you're calling from. Go ahead with your question. Go ahead, Dennis.

Dennis:

Yeah. My confidence level is pretty low one when I do get the shot on the 1C category that the second shots are going to be available. I don't like to status, that's seemsto be on the news about the availability of the second shot being at the right timeframe.

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

Can I answer?

Dennis:

[crosstalk 00:28:11] my confidence.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Steve, do you have any comment on that or anyone like this?

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

Can I answer that? I mean, it's an [crosstalk 00:28:19]

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

And once again, it's great Doctor. Just looking for someone to answer that. I appreciate it. Thank you.

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

Yeah. So the great news about the vaccines are that the protection after one dose, after about two weeks after the vaccine is very high it's somewhere upwards of 80 to 90% after one dose, not immediately after the vaccine, but two weeks after that first dose, the second dose will boost that immune response, increase the effectiveness to something like 95%, which is even better. But if you get one dose, you will be protected for enough time to get the second dose.

Steve McAdams:

And now I'd like to add on that as well. When we're receiving our first shots of 88,000 a week, the federal government is automatically putting in their ordering system to ship us another 88,000 to match that first two weeks later. And today, all of the folks who are eligible for a second shot or are going to be getting their second shot, so, what was in the news has been resolved with a glitch that there was and we do have it all resolved, secretary resolve that with HHS today.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Okay, thank you for that. Okay, next question.

Jamie Lannon:

Sure. And just a reminder, if you're just joining us, it's star three, please press star three on your phone, and you'll be connected with a staff person who will take your question. Next up, we have Sherry Jackson from Baltimore County. Go ahead, Ms. Jackson. Ms. Jackson, you're live. Sherry, are you with us?

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

More time.

Jaime Lennon:

Okay. Let's go to Adela. Adela Ward, are you with us?

Adela Ward:

Yes, I'm here. My question is, we have no distribution going through doctor's offices, the same way they give out the flu shot each year and we come in and get it, why isn't there something done where they can get batches of the flu shot and also distributed to the same way they pick up flu shot medication each year, they could also get the vaccine, is that possible?

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Steve I can say you're the best one to answer [crosstalk 00:31:01]

Steve McAdams:

Yes. Adela, thank you for that question. And Adela, you're going to see the same process or the same ramping up with the vaccine shots that you're seeing with the test kits. This time last year, there were no test kits and people had a hard time getting tests. We had maybe 10 or 50 at first, and then it evolved, 60 days later we had more. And then it got to the point by August, you're able to do 50,000 tests, and today, you can pretty much walk into any urgent care or doctor's office or anywhere and get a test.

Steve McAdams:

And the simple fact is right now, the manufacturing hasn't matured to the point where the doses are being distributed at that level yet, but that level is coming and it will get there, is probably just going to follow around the same timeline as the test, unless another supplier like Johnson and Johnson, who has already a 100 million doses produced waiting ship gets approved and those can be shipped out, but it will be common is just not at the stage yet, and it's just due to the minimum amount of supply.

Jinline Chan:

Yeah, and this with Dr. Chan, if I could just add on, and appreciate that comment, because that's exactly where we're going as Mr. McAdams indicated, and some of our providers are already in gold and receiving some vaccine. These are federally qualified health centers are receiving a number of doses. And we are encouraging all providers around the state to start the signup process on our immune system, and so we're communicating with them so that when the time comes, and we have more supply that they can receive vaccines and habits available for patients. So thank you.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Okay. Next question.

Jaime Lennon:

So next we have Donna from [inaudible 00:33:06]. Donna, go ahead with your question.

Donna:

Hello everybody. Thank you for taking my call. I am in the 1C group, African-American and I do have a health challenge and I registered online, and I think Mr. McAdams addressed the fact that you register first and then your contact to make an appointment. So I wanted to find out if it's okay to register it more than one place, and then whoever contacts you first for an appointment, you go with that, and then if you contact again, you ignore it. The other thing too I wanted to ask is that I never registration form, as you know they do ask your race and if you have any health conditions, so does that bump you up the list, so if you're in a 1C group, does that bump you up the list particularly since African-Americans are affected disproportionately from COVID, does that bump you up the list when you tell them that you are African-American and you have a health challenge?

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Who want on the panel can answer that they [inaudible 00:34:22] issues race. [crosstalk 00:34:27]

Steve McAdams:

Go ahead, sorry.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Yeah. Who is it? Steve, is that you?

Steve McAdams:

Yes. So there's several different distribution methods from the first step when the vaccine first came on limited amount and the goal was to get them to first responders and hospital workers and the government workers that needed to keep food workers. So those vaccines were work with the health departments and distributed by them. And it was a great model in order to address the very first urgent lay out. Now, as we move forward, as we add additional providers to build out infrastructure, because the health departments would never be able to handle once the mass vaccinations came in to do everybody within a very quick time period.

Steve McAdams:

So we're building out the other infrastructures and in order to make sure that you can get to health department, your local health department plus the additional sites that the state is standing out within the counties and the private providers, you can go to the Maryland website, which is and we can send this to a Congressman and he can redistributed to you, coronavirus.maryland.gov/vaccine, and you can go on there and you can register, and it should be at a point where it will have all of the providers in addition to the local health departments. So, you can go on there and register, and that will let you know everything that's available to you in your area. And when you're available to get one, when you're selected for our time, you'll be able to go on there and select which ones are available to get that.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Thank you, Steve. And Dr. Chen from Baltimore County, do you have anything to add to that? Since our caller was from Baltimore County.

Dr. Alexander Chen:

Yes. So obviously there are quite a large number of people who are eager to get the vaccine, and we are trying to get it to everybody, but first we have to complete as much of 1B as we can. I know we are all concerned about the inequities that COVID has made very, very obvious, we are tracking the harder-hit minorities, including African-Americans and Hispanics, that does not automatically move anybody up in the distribution list, but we are keeping track of that, and we want to make sure that everybody does get a fair access to this vaccine. Thank you.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Thank you. Next question.

Jaime Lennon:

Sure. On the phone we have Loretta from Anna Arundel County. Loretta, you're up next.

Loretta:

To all, I think my question may have answered. My question was regard to group 1C. Approximately how many people are there in the 64...

Jaime Lennon:

Loretta, I apologize. Please call back with your question, we have a technical issue, I apologize for that. In the meantime, let's go with Marion in Dundalk. Marion, you're live.

Marion:

Hi, I first want to... Hello?

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Yeah.

Marion:

Hi, I just want to thank everybody first. Thank you, Congressman Ruppertsberger for all your hard work and thank you to all of the health professionals that have been tirelessly working on this since we got hit first and foremost. I have array of questions. I am a young woman, I'm 39 and I need a lung transplant

and I'm also a single mother, and they want to open schools March 1st. I am not currently living in Dundalk at the moment. As soon as Coronavirus hit, I ran to my parents pretty quick, because I didn't want to be around people because I was scared. So my question is, first, is there... I know that there's not a timeline because of distribution things, but do you think that the opening of schools and the next phase may coincide with each other?

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Steve, will you try to answer that?

Steve McAdams:

Yes, I can try and answer. So with the opening of schools, I believe that every county in Baltimore City will give parents a choice to whether they're going to have their child participate in the hybrid system where they'll go to school for a few days, and then also have the ability, if you're uncomfortable with that, to continue with the distant learning online. So, there are considerations made for families that may have somebody that is home and maybe in a compromised position because of their health and if you are uncomfortable with sending your children to school, you can continue on in the online remote learning space.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Okay. Thank you. Thank you.

Jaime Lennon:

Okay. We just got a question about how you sign up for the Congress' newsletter. You can just simply press star six, if you'd like to receive more information moving forward. Next let's go with Joanne Max. Joanne, you're up.

Joanne Max:

Thanks for taking my call for [inaudible 00:40:30]. Hi, thank you for taking my call and being here. I am a, will be 64 in a couple months year old female who has a compromised immune system. I have extreme CLPD. When I went to my doctor, they told me because I don't have a spleen, I cannot get the vaccination, and I can't find verification of that, and I was wondering if Dr. Chan may know if in fact that would prevent me from getting the vaccine.

Jinline Chan:

[crosstalk 00:40:57] Go ahead, sir.

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

Yeah, I'm happy.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

You're [inaudible 00:41:03] okay.

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

Yeah. So, there is no reason why you cannot get the vaccine. In fact, I would encourage you to get the vaccine because not having a spleen puts you at increased risk for certain infections, so, not necessarily

COVID, but other kinds of infections, so you absolutely can get the vaccine. The only two contraindications to the vaccine are, is anybody with an allergy to the first dose of vaccine, an immediate allergic reaction should not get the second dose until they've talked to allergist or people with a confirmed allergy to a component of the vaccine.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Thank you. Okay, next.

Jaime Lennon:

Sure. Next up we have Sarah Star. Sarah, go ahead with your question.

Sarah Star:

Yes. I was just wanted to know the correct way to sign up. I live in Baltimore County, and I want to know the correct way to sign up to get the vaccine. I'd already signed up with Baltimore County, but my question is, do I need to sign up with Costco, Rite Aid, CVS, Walmart, all these places?

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Dr. Chan from Baltimore County can you that question?

Dr. Alexander Chen:

Well, at least for the Baltimore County, once you have signed up, your name will be kept in our registry and you will get an invitation to one of our clinics as soon as we have the vaccine and your number comes to the top. I don't know if I can answer the other question about private pharmacies, I think that would be something that would be individual.

Steve McAdams:

I can give you guidance on that, Sarah. You can go to coronavirus.maryland.gov/vaccine, and you will be able to register on those and we will have all those providers linked in together.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Okay. Next. Thank you.

Jaime Lennon:

Okay. Next, we're going to take a question from Sherry. Sherry unfortunately got disconnected and she just submitted her question on Facebook. Her question is how can she expedite the vaccine for her 95-year-old mother in Northern Baltimore County?

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Okay. I guess Gr. Chan, you again, Baltimore County.

Dr. Alexander Chen:

Yes. So if she hasn't, she should visit our website. It is, I don't know if I can... It's kind of hard to read off over the phone. I don't think it would translate well, but I think if you go to the Baltimore County website, there should be a link that will take you to a registration site. So that would be the best way to

go. Unfortunately, as I said, there is a very, very large amount of demand for the vaccine, so it is taking a little while for people to get an invitation to our clinic. So all I can do right now is urge everyone to be patient as much as possible. Thank you.

Jaime Lennon:

Okay. Next we have Beverly from Harford [inaudible 00:44:09]. Go ahead, Beverly.

Beverly:

Yes. Good evening, everyone. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to ask my question. My question was my husband gets services from the veterans administration, so he'll be receiving his COVID shot, but the rest of us in the household will not receive our shots, not any time in the future, I imagine. Will he be contagious to those of us in the household once he gets his inoculation?

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Well, I guess Dr. Talaat you can handle that from a medical point of view, but we have three representatives from Harford County. Marcy, deputy health commissioner, Molly Communications director, and Lynda, and nursing supervisor. So if you want to step in after Dr. Talaat, go ahead.

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

So, thank you for that question. The vaccine is not lie, and so he can't spread it to anybody else. So he won't be contagious from the vaccine perspective, what we don't know and what we're hoping to learn soon is how well the vaccine protects us up from catching COVID in our nose, not getting sick with it and potentially transmitting it to others. So until everybody is vaccinated, we should still continue wearing our masks, we should still practice social distancing, and we should practice [inaudible 00:45:40] wash your hands when we're around people not in our own household, but in your own household, no, he won't be contagious and you can behave normally.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Okay. Anyone from Harford County who want to add to that?

Marcy Austin:

Yeah. This is Marcy Austin from the Hartford County Health Department, and I would just encourage the rest of the family to go ahead and register for the vaccine on our website, Harford County Health Department's website, or the Coronavirus, the other one that was mentioned at the state.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Okay. Okay. Next question.

Jaime Lennon:

Sure. Next we have Carissa from Lutherville. Go ahead, Carissa.

Carissa:

Thank you so much for taking my call. My name is Carissa and I live in Baltimore County, but I teach for Baltimore City and my concern is, we are returning in March, and although we have been moved to phase 1B me and a lot of other teachers have not been contacted to get the vaccine. Our concern is this,

when we walk into those doors, we're not protected, and although the students are given options of remaining virtual or attending classes in the school, the teachers have no options. So other than the kind of work before I get vaccinated. So I'm jeopardizing my life and my family's life because I'm opting to keep my kids home for the school who attend Baltimore County, but I'm risking myself by going into Baltimore City by not having any resources or aids to get vaccinated, even though I'm on the 1B list.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Okay. [crosstalk00:47:42] Yeah, go ahead.

Jinline Chan:

Great.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Dr. Chang go ahead.

Jinline Chan:

Thank you for your question. Yes. Thank you for your question. And the governor has prioritized educators and educational staff, but again, with limited numbers of vaccine we are pushing those out to a number of different priority groups. We are working closely with MSCE and the superintendent of schools, Dr. Simon, who's been in communication with local superintendents, including, Dr. [inaudible 00:48:18] in Baltimore City.

Jinline Chan:

So there are plans to roll that out to educators, but with limited vaccines that may not be able to cover all who wish to receive vaccine at one time, but as we do have available supply, we are providing those to local health departments who are in many counties partnering with local public school system, as well as for non-public schools. So, we will be communicating with superintendents and I do that on a weekly basis to communicate that, and that should be something that's communicated out to all of the staff as well. So, I will certainly take your message back. So thank you.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

And we also have with us the president of Baltimore City Council Nick Mosby, if you want to add anything, that's fine, if not, that's fine also. Nick.

Jaime Lennon:

Okay. We'll move on. Next we have Cui Monique from Anne Arundel County. Cui [inaudible 00:49:25] waited a long time to ask her question, if you're still with us, go ahead. Cui Monique, are you with us?

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Hello. Maybe she hung up.

Jaime Lennon:

Okay, we'll move on.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

We just haven't gotten many from Anne Arundel so far. We have our panel deputy CEO of health and human services. So as we get one from Anne Arundel County will go to you.

Jinline Chan:

Thank.

Jaime Lennon:

[crosstalk 00:50:03] we have one from Hartford County. Angela, if you're still with us, go ahead with your question.

Angela:

Yes. Hi. I just wanted to know this vaccine, or if somebody is sick with and taking other medications, like other antibiotics or anything like that, does it have any effect towards that, and what medications should you avoid taking?

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Dr. Talaat, I think you can answer that hopefully.

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

Yeah. So there's no problem with taking other medications when you're getting the vaccine. You can take your regular medications and it shouldn't interfere with how the vaccine works. The only thing is if you are taking something that suppresses your immune system, because either chemotherapy or something for an autoimmune disease, it might decrease how well the vaccine works, but it won't change how safe the vaccine is, so the vaccine will remain safe but you really want your immune system to respond to it. The only thing I would avoid is taking anything like Tylenol, ibuprofen, Benadryl, et cetera, before you get the vaccine, because we know that some of those medicines may interfere with the immune system's ability, again, to respond to the vaccine. If after you get the vaccine, you have a sore arm, when your immune system responds to it, you do have some side effects such as you can have muscle aches or chills or joint takes, or even a low grade fever, if those things happen, then you can go ahead and take Tylenol or ibuprofen, and that's perfectly safe, but I wouldn't take it right before you get the vaccine.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Next question.

Jaime Lennon:

Sure. Next we have Ken from Laurel. Ken, if you're still with us, go ahead with your question, please.

Ken:

[crosstalk 00:52:01] thanks for taking my call. I had two questions. So the first one has to do with the vaccine choice. I know there's only two choices right now, and hopefully more will be in a future. If we had a preference, like if I wanted to take the Johnson and Johnson vaccine when my name is called, do we have a choice or do we just only get wherever we're asked to go to and get it there?

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Dr. Talaat.

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

It might actually be a better question for Dr. Chan, but I would recommend for the two that are currently available, that they are really equivalent in terms of their safety and efficacy. And so I would take whatever is available when you... Because most sites only have one vaccine, as far as I know, so I would take whatever is available when you go there. When there's more vaccines licensed or approved, that may be different, but for now I think they're really very much the same.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Good. Thank you. Next question.

Jaime Lennon:

Sure. Next, we have Robert Harold. Robert, you're live.

Christie:

Actually, this is his wife Christie, we have the same phone number of course. I'm In Howard County in Laurel, and first of all, I want to thank you very much for having this town hall. I appreciate the opportunity to listen to the experts and the answers to the questions. And I really want to thank the doctor for letting us know that we should not be taking Tylenol and ibuprofen prior to taking the vaccine. I actually had not heard that. And I am a devotee of Dr. Fauci. So I didn't hear that at all.

Christie:

My first question is if you first sign up for... When you first sign up, if you get the Pfizer shot, when it's time for the second shot, would there be a possibility that there might not be a Pfizer shot available and you would have to take a Moderna or something else as your second shot and would that cause a problem? And then my other question is do you anticipate that there are going to be boosters that will be coming throughout the year to kind of handle the variants that are popping up? And I haven't been able to find a Howard County signups site yet.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Dr. Talaat, maybe you can answer some of that and Steve, you might want to add a little bit to that too.

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

Sure.

Steve McAdams:

Yeah, I can answer. I can answer the first part, from the protocols with the record keeping, you will receive the same vaccine that you received the first time. And it's a very robust record keeping. So, at this point, everybody is getting the same shot that they received the first time.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Okay.

Jaime Lennon:

Okay. Next we have Simone from Baltimore.

Simone:

Hello, can you hear me?

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Yes.

Simone:

Yes. Okay. So I have a question. Well, the two questions are related to the safety of the vaccine, and I wanted to know, I keep hearing different information on whether or not it's safe for children or pregnant women. I know that the last time I read the World Health Organization that they don't recommend pregnant women to get the shot, and I know that the transmission in children is pretty low.

Simone:

So I know the CDC is saying that pregnant women can't get the shot. So I wanted to know what's really the facts on that. And I wanted to know being the vaccine is supposed to stop the transmission of the virus, but if we are still required to wear a mask, can we still get infected with the virus even as we get the vaccine? And I just wanted to know about any potential injuries that could occur if someone is injured, who do we report these injuries to, with all medications, there's always a risk of side effects that you could injure a person. I'm not really getting clear answers on those, so if someone could answer those, I would appreciate. Thank you.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

I think that was a good question for Dr. Talaat. And another thing, we've been getting different emails about children journaling, could you discuss the status of where children would be, why they're not getting shots, there's susceptibility to the virus, that type of thing, when you answer the questions that were just asked.

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

Yeah. So those are-

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

You're getting most of the work here tonight, you and Steve.

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

Those are really good questions. So the first is the safety of the vaccine in pregnant women. The trials that were used to authorize the vaccines did not include [inaudible 00:57:06] These are not live vaccines, they don't replicate and they don't cross into the placenta. So there's no reason to think that they won't be safe and pregnant. And so pregnant women are...

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

The CDC said that pregnant women should talk with their doctors, but if they are at risk for COVID within their priority group, they should consider getting the vaccine because COVID in pregnant women is more severe than COVID in a non-pregnant woman, and you wouldn't want somebody to die of COVID when

there was an effective and safe vaccine available. The government is collecting data on pregnant women who get the vaccine so that they could monitor the safety and the efficacy of the vaccine in that group.

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

And so we will have data as soon, hopefully to look at that, but the reason why others may not recommend it is because they weren't included in the trials, but if I were pregnant and I had a high risk job, I would definitely get the vaccine. In children, it's a different issue. So, we know that children aren't as severely affected by COVID as adults, even though they can be infected, very few children end up in the hospital and very, very few children have died. So the risk benefit ratio is a little bit different in children. Also, the vaccines are still being evaluated in children. So when we did the original trials, we went down to age 16 for the Pfizer vaccine and 18 for the Moderna vaccines. So the FDA authorized the Pfizer vaccine down to 16, and the Moderna vaccine for adults 18 and older.

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

They're doing the trials in adolescents, 12 and older now, we should have some of those first results in the spring, hopefully. And so, my prediction, and I think Dr. Fauci heard it on the radio this morning too, is by late spring, early summer, we might have the vaccine authorized in children down to age 12. Under that there is actually no data. We have not yet done any trials in children under the age of 12.

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

We're going to start doing them in the spring and into the summer, and so hopefully by fall, we'll have some of the data on the safety of the vaccine in that age group. But because like I said, the risk benefit ratio is a little bit different in that children aren't as severely affected. We want to go slowly into it and make sure that it is as safe as it appears to be in adult before we authorize it in kids.

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

In terms of what happens, yes, there are side effects and people can have sort of allergic reactions from the vaccine. If you feel like you've had a serious side effect, when you get the vaccine, they will give you a sheet of paper information about the vaccine and on that sheet of paper, there will be the phone number and an email address for the vaccine adverse event reporting system, and that is a CDC and FDA joint entity that monitors all safety for all licensed vaccines, and so please report any injuries to the vaccine adverse event reporting system, that database is followed very carefully by the CDC and by the FDA and any signals that appear will be investigated to see if they're truly related to vaccine or not. Did I answer all your questions?

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Let me add there too there. How about the very young children one to maybe four and then the different age, the elementary school children, have we not done testing there or what is the issue there as far as the virus?

Dr. Kawsar Talaat:

We haven't done any testing in anybody under 12. After those studies have been evaluated and the vaccine shows that it's safe and effective in kids down to age 12, then we'll go down five to 12. And we're going slowly by age, and then once we've done the studies in kids over five and older, then we'll go down to kids under five. So we're going very slowly in kids just to make sure that we're being as

careful as possible and as safe as possible. And again, because kids are not primarily those that are most severely [inaudible 01:01:32]

Jaime Lennon:

Okay. We have time for one more question. And I know Loretta who got booted earlier with technical difficulties is in a long line. The queue is over 100 people right now. So we appreciate everybody's patience. Loretta's question was about the 65 to 75 year age range. How many people are in that group and what is our timeframe for receiving a vaccine?

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Okay, Steve, can you answer that?

Steve McAdams:

I can. It's estimated that there's 2 million rounders in that age group or in that availability brackets. And currently, we are receiving 88,000 doses, the same first doses a week. So, it's going to take a little bit of time, but the key thing to remember is that the number of doses that we're receiving today will not be the number of doses that we'll be receiving in two, three, four, six, eight weeks from now. So the doses will accelerate as production and distribution matures and other in the Johnson and Johnson vaccine comes online.

Jaime Lennon:

Thank you for that. And thank you to everybody who has been waiting to ask their questions. Unfortunately, that's all the time we have for questions tonight. Thank you for joining us. And we hope you found this call informative. Congressman Ruppertsberger.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Yeah, but first, I want to thank you all for joining this, it was factual. I appreciate the constituents of mine who are so interested in the issue. This is probably the most difficult issue we're going to handle in a long time, even though we have a lot of other issues out there too. I want to thank our guests, they were great. Dr. Talaat, you had most of the question and Steve, you too. You did a great job. Dr. Chan from the State of Baltimore County, Dr. Chen, chief division of communicable diseases, Harford County. I said Marcy, deputy health officer Molly Communications, Director Lynda, nursing supervisor, Anne Arundel County, Pamela, deputy CAO health and human services. Thank you so much. You really answered a lot of the questions that we needed to have answered, and we really appreciate it.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

If we didn't get to your question, please do not hesitate to call my office any weekday from 9:00 AM until 5:00 PM. You can email me anytime through my website, www.dutch.house.gov, and we will respond as quickly as possible. If you haven't already press star six to sign up for my e-newsletter, which is great way to stay up to date moving forward on the Coronavirus and other issues affecting our community.

Congressman Ruppertsberger:

Finally, I want to remind everyone to do their part. I urge each and every one of you to get your vaccine when it's your turn. If you have already received the vaccine, is still important to wear your mask,

maintain social distance and wash your hands. Be kind of one another, as we're all in this together, whether it's federal state, local or Democrat, Republican, or whatever, your political persuasion, this is an issue facing all of us and we have to stay together as a team and do our little part to take this COVID and crush it. Thank you. Good night.