

Batter up: Fenway ready for mass COVID-19 vaccinations

By Chris Van Buskirk
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Hot dogs and pricey beer won't be on the menu next week when Fenway Park opens up again.

How about a COVID-19 vaccine and a view of the storied field that has seen some of the greatest and worst moments of Red Sox history. Walk down the concourse just inside Gate A at Fenway Park and you'll see Sammy's on 3rd, typically a great place to grab a drink during a game.

But people walking near the bar Friday weren't there to grab something to gulp down before the first inning as they were getting a dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine.

Lisa Ivey of Boston, a personal care attendant and a part of 1199SEIU, got her first shot of the vaccine. She said she feels privileged because "unfortunately there are still a lot of people" waiting.

"I'm really ecstatic to have this opportunity to be here because there are a lot of people who are petrified. And as we stand up, and show that this is really important, so we can put this pandemic to rest," she told reporters moments after getting a dose. "Everyone needs to be accountable to getting a shot."

Starting Monday those in the first phase of the state's distribution plan and people 75 and older can make their way to Fenway to take the first or second step in inoculating themselves against the virus. Appointments are required. Officials involved in the program said they plan to offer 500 doses a day starting Monday with an eventual goal of 1,250 a

day.

Fenway is the state's second large-scale vaccination site alongside Gillette Stadium, both operated by CIC Health. Gov. Charlie Baker announced that Gillette Stadium would serve as the state's first mass vaccination site just over two weeks ago and it started serving first responders last week.

The opening of mass sites comes as people have reported frustration and confusion with scheduling an appointment. Gov. Charlie Baker urged patience as he said the state planned to add more availability and launch a call center to help the scheduling process.

CIC Health Chief Operations Officer Rachel Wilson said people will be able to move through the vaccination process at Fenway in about 45 minutes to an hour.

"This is the second mass vaccination site that we've opened," she said. "And through that process, we've understood what it will take to avoid queues. And we believe that our workflows are such that and our space availability indoors is such that people will not have to wait outdoors."

Even if it snows, the site plans to stay open and honor appointments. If the weather is so bad that road conditions are unsafe and transit to Fenway becomes dangerous, officials said they will "proactively notify individuals to cancel their appointments" and will help reschedule them.

The Fenway site plans to operate from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. In a few weeks, hours will expand to 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and include weekend options.

A person scheduled to get a vaccine at Fenway enters through Gate A, proceeds to a signup area complete with a socially distanced area for a line to form. From there, they walk up a rampway, past several concession stands, and into the vaccination area.

A team of workers prepare doses of the vaccine on top of a bar and then gives them to workers who inject them into arms. People who get the vaccine can then walk over to one of the several selfie stations that provide a scenic view of the baseball field " on Friday it was covered in a layer of snow.

Linda Edge, a personal care attendant of 11 years from Quincy, also made her way out to Fenway Park Friday to get a shot. The consumer that she works with has compromised sicknesses and she felt it was important to get inoculated.

"The location here is excellent, used to come here as a kid, but it was much easier for me to come here," she told reporters.

Sarah McKenna, Red Sox senior vice president for fan services and entertainment, said Fenway has an emotional impact on the region, and doling out vaccines is the park's greatest responsibility it has had in a long time.

What happens when the Sox play ball in April?

"We'll make it work. I mean, that's what we do," McKenna said.