

Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association announces the Priority One: (D) Congregate Care Vaccination Roll Out for Inmates and Staff

As distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine ramps up across the nation, Massachusetts sheriffs are preparing to inoculate the incarcerated individuals in their custody and their correctional staff.

Beginning on Jan. 18, correctional facilities will begin their part of the vaccination plan for congregate care settings, in accordance with the timeline established by the Baker-Polito Administration and the Department of Public Health in consultation with the Massachusetts Vaccine Advisory Group. Members of the incarcerated population and correctional officers fall within the Phase One Priority, (D): Congregate Care, which includes both shelters and correctional institutions. Both inmates and correctional staff will be vaccinated concurrently.

"We have been working diligently in collaboration with the Baker Administration, the Department of Public Health, the Vaccine Advisory Group and our resident infectious disease specialist Dr. Alysse Wurcel to insure that we are fully prepared for this crucial next step," said newly-elected President of the Massachusetts Sheriff's Association and Suffolk County Sheriff, Steven W. Tompkins. "Our mandate is for the safe custody and care of those remanded to us by the courts, but we also have a critical responsibility for the health and safety of the men and women who deliver on that mandate. These vaccinations protect both our incarcerated

populations and the people who oversee their safety, which ultimately protects the health and safety of the general public.”

Hampden County Sheriff Nick Cocchi, the new vice president of the MSA, said he is hopeful that the rollout of the vaccine to congregate care settings in Massachusetts will mark a true turning point in the pandemic.

“I think it’s important that correctional staff and the people in our care and custody are offered the COVID vaccine at the same time, not only from a medical standpoint to maximize immunity, but to build trust,” Cocchi said. “The vaccine is the subject of some skepticism, but I am encouraged by the science. And I’m hopeful that our staff and the people whose health and safety we are responsible for will continue to be accepting of it through education and seeing others around them be inoculated.”

Over the past several weeks, working closely with the Department of Public Health and in consultation with Dr. Wurcel, staff have prepared for the vaccination roll out. To date, nearly 1,000 health care professionals and COVID-facing staff have been vaccinated within the 14 Sheriffs’ Offices in accordance with Phase One (A) as outlined by the Department of Public Health, classifying these correctional health care professionals alongside their peers working in hospitals, community health centers and long-term care facilities.

“In my discussions with my patients who are incarcerated, several people are interested in the vaccine, and others are interested but have questions,” said Dr. Wurcel. “Even with all of the prevention, testing and mitigation strategies in place, people who are in jail and prison represent one of the highest risk populations. I am excited to work closely with the sheriffs to plan an equitable roll-out of the vaccine to their staff and all of the people in custody.”

While the FDA has issued emergency use authorizations for both

the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, correctional facilities have been receiving vaccines from Moderna, which is headquartered in Cambridge with a production facility in Norwood.

Once the vaccination of incarcerated individuals and correctional staff commences, it will continue with education around the benefits and risks of the vaccine, and be offered to new inmates and staff as requested.