

# Trusted companions to seniors will gain vaccine access in Massachusetts

By Matt Murphy

State House News Service

In an effort to make the COVID-19 vaccine more accessible to residents 75 and older, the Baker administration plans to begin this week allowing anyone who accompanies an eligible senior to one of the state's mass vaccination sites to receive a shot themselves.

Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders said the new accommodation for trusted family, friends, neighbors or caregivers to get vaccinated along with vulnerable seniors came after consultation with councils on aging and other advocated for older adults.

While all the mass vaccination sites are handicap accessible, sites like Gillette Stadium or Fenway Park can be unfamiliar and intimidating to some, and allowing trusted companions to also get vaccinated is an effort to encourage more seniors to seek the inoculation.

Massachusetts currently has four mass vaccination sites open at Gillette Stadium, Fenway Park, the Eastfield Mall in Springfield and the DoubleTree Hotel in Danvers. The Reggie Lewis Center in Roxbury is open to Boston residents and being operated by the city, but will soon transition to a mass vaccination site run by the state.

Sudders said that Gov. Charlie Baker on Wednesday will also announce new mass vaccination sites planned for the Natick Mall and the former Circuit City in Dartmouth.

The Natick site will partner with LabCorp to begin administering 500 shots a day on Feb. 22, ramping up to as many as 3,000 doses a day. The Dartmouth location will open two days later on Feb. 24 in partnership with Curtative. The site will also have the capacity to handle 500 patients a day to start, and eventually will be able to administer 2,000 shots a day, depending on supply.

Appointments for the new sites will go online beginning Feb. 18.

With Massachusetts now receiving about 108,000 doses of Pfizer and Moderna vaccine a week from the federal government, Sudders said the state will post 100,000 appointments this week, including 74,000 new appointments that will be added online on Thursday.

Thirty new new retail pharmacy sites are opening at CVS and Walgreens locations around the state, and Sudders said 30,000 of the new appointments will be at pharmacies.

Baker, Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito and Sudders planned to tour the mass vaccination site at the DoubleTree Hotel in Danvers on Wednesday morning at 11 a.m.

Earlier in the week, Baker said the mass vaccination sites were "batting about 100 percent in terms of vaccine allocated and vaccine administered, and they'll continue to operate at that level."

There are roughly 496,000 resident over the age of 75 in Massachusetts, including those living in long-term care facilities. Baker said Monday that roughly 200,000 in that age bracket had been vaccinated so far.

The Department of Public Health reported Tuesday that of the 1,283,700 vaccine doses shipped to Massachusetts so far, 910,412 doses had been administered, or about 70.9 percent.