World War II Veteran Gets COVID-19 Vaccine at VA Bedford

By Katie Lannan and Michael P. Norton
State House News Service

As the first COVID-19 vaccines began arriving in Massachusetts on Monday, a 96-year-old World War II veteran in Bedford became the first VA patient in the country to get the shot.

The VA Bedford Healthcare system announced the milestone over social media, posting that Margaret Klessens, a resident of the Community Living Center in the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital received the shot at 12:07 p.m.

Andrew Miller, a housekeeper in environmental management service, was the first VA Bedford employee to get the vaccine, at 12:20 p.m.

The recipients of the Bedford VA's first doses are among the initial tier of Americans to receive a COVID-19 vaccine outside of manufacturers' trials in the early rounds of a distribution campaign that is set to strech for months.

The Bedford system is one of 37 VA sites the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs tapped to receive its first doses of COVID-19 vaccines for front-line health care workers and long-term care residents.

Massachusetts ordered its initial round of 59,475 doses of Pfizer vaccines — which received emergency use authorization from the Food and Drug Administration on Friday — from the federal government on Dec. 4. Those doses, according to Gov. Charlie Baker's office, will be delivered to 21 hospitals and the Department of Public Health immunization lab, then

redistributed to 74 hospitals across the state for front-line medical workers.

A COVID-19 vaccine shipment arrived at Boston Medical Center on Monday morning. [Courtesy/BMC]

The next 40,000 doses of Pfizer vaccines "will be allocated to the Federal Pharmacy Program to begin vaccinating staff and residents of skilled nursing facilities, rest homes and assisted living residences," Baker's office said on Dec. 9.

Boston Medical Center received 1,950 doses Monday morning of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, a spokesman confirmed.

"Beginning Wednesday, we will begin the first wave of vaccinations to front line health care workers, a group including doctors and nurses from our ICU and Emergency Department and patient floors that treat COVID-19 patients, but just as importantly, employees from environmental and support services, and other crucial positions that work in COVID-positive patient areas," the hospital said.

Massachusetts officials expect to receive 300,000 first doses of the two-shot vaccine by the end of the month.

The Massachusetts Health & Hospital Association on Monday trumpeted the Friday vote by the Food & Drug Administration to approve the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use, writing in its newsletter that health care workers and long-term care facility residents "can expect to get vaccinated as early as this week."

Boston Medical Center received nearly 2,000 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine on Monday. [Courtesy/BMC]

"The fact that this vaccine, and another from Moderna that is expected to be approved shortly, went from conception to large-scale distribution within a year is unparalleled in the history of vaccinations," the MHA wrote in its Monday Report.

The MHA said one concern of its vaccine workgroup, who has about 80 members from nearly all hospitals across the state, is that the two-dose vaccine, delivered about three weeks

apart, "has been reported to cause some recipients discomfort for a day or more after the initial dose â€" a similar reaction to other viral vaccines."

Hospitals plan to stagger vaccine delivery to avoid gaps in their workforce if employees take a sick day, the MHA said.

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy told Martha Raddatz of ABC News Sunday that he would be on hand Tuesday when the first vaccine shots in his state will be given at University Hospital in Newark.

"We will begin vaccinating our heroic health care workers," Murphy said. "It's gonna be a big day on Tuesday morning in Newark."