

### **Middlesex County COVID-19 Vaccine Talking Points**

- For the most up-to-date COVID-19 information in Middlesex County including scheduling for vaccines and testing, case numbers, health information, helpful resources, and more, please visit [www.middlesexcountynj.gov/covid19](http://www.middlesexcountynj.gov/covid19)
- People who cannot register online, or have more detailed questions, can be directed to our Call Center at 732-745-3100.
- New Jersey has launched its statewide vaccine scheduling system, the [New Jersey Vaccine Scheduling System \(NJVSS\)](#), to help all potential vaccine recipients identify nearby vaccine distribution sites and schedule an appointment.
- The State's toll-free vaccination hotline (855-568-0545) is available to assist callers with identifying if they are currently eligible for a vaccination, pre-register for the vaccine, and to help them identify locations nearest to them where they can get vaccinated. The hotline is open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. every day and can help callers in more than 240 different languages. Hotline agents are currently unable to assist in scheduling appointments.
- If you experience an error or need support with the New Jersey Vaccine Scheduling System, you can complete an online form at [covid19.nj.gov/vaccinehelp](https://covid19.nj.gov/vaccinehelp)
- COVID-19 vaccines will be made available to individuals regardless of insurance coverage status. Individuals won't pay coinsurance, deductibles, or copayments. Providers that administer vaccinations to patients without health insurance or whose insurance does not provide coverage of vaccination administration fees may not charge enrollees directly for any vaccine administration costs.
- Middlesex County is looking for volunteers to assist with COVID-19 vaccination in medical and non-medical roles. For more information, please visit [www.middlesexcountynj.gov/covid19](http://www.middlesexcountynj.gov/covid19)

### **COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout – Overview, Phasing, and Scheduling**

- The State of New Jersey has begun to roll out COVID-19 vaccines in a [phased approach](#) to all adults who live, work, or are being educated in the State. The State's Professional Advisory Committee (PAC) uses the CDC ACIP recommendations for phase eligibility to inform their deliberations, but the State's phases may differ from the CDC recommendations.
  - Currently vaccines are available to the following groups;
    - Healthcare Personnel (Phase 1A)
    - Long-Term Care Residents and Staff (Phase 1A)
    - First Responders (Phase 1B)
    - Individuals 16-64 with certain medical conditions, [as defined by the CDC](#) (Phase 1B)
    - Individuals ages 65 and older (Phase 1B)
  - Beginning on **March 15th** the following groups will become eligible:
    - Pre-K – 12th grade educators and support staff
    - Childcare workers in licensed and registered settings
    - Public and local transportation workers; including bus, taxi, rideshare, and airport employees, NJ Transit workers, Motor Vehicle Commission Staff
    - Public safety workers who are not sworn law enforcement or fire professionals including probation officers and fire safety inspectors
    - Migrant farmworkers
    - Members of Tribal communities

- Individuals experiencing homelessness and those living in shelter, including domestic violence shelters
- Beginning on **March 29th**, the following groups will become eligible:
  - Food production, agriculture, and food distribution
  - Eldercare and support
  - Warehousing and logistics
  - Social services support staff
  - Elections personnel
  - Hospitality
  - Medical supply chain
  - Postal and shipping services
  - Clergy
  - Judicial system
- The list of those eligible to receive the vaccine [is being continuously updated](#).
  - *As per the State of New Jersey, please note: Vaccination phases are tentative and subject to change. The movement between vaccination eligibility phases may be fluid. One phase may overlap with another. Not all individuals in each phase will be vaccinated before opening to additional groups, and not all groups within a specific phase will be made eligible to receive the vaccine at the same time.*
- Vaccinations began on December 15, 2020 in New Jersey Hospitals for paid and unpaid persons serving in their health facilities.
- Through the [Federal Pharmacy Partnership for Long-Term Care Program](#) with CVS and Walgreens, New Jersey has administered the COVID-19 vaccine at New Jersey nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Doses for these settings have already been reserved in the State's allocation. Those in other congregate care settings are a priority but may not have been contacted by the pharmacy program or NJDOH on their status yet.

### **COVID-19 Vaccine Supply Chain**

- The State places direct orders with the Federal Government, and the State receives an amount at the discretion of the federal government, which is then subsequently subdivided and distributed by the State.
- This week, the County received 4,000 vaccines for administration to County residents
  - Number of Doses Received by County Government: 36,200 (1st and 2nd doses)
  - Number of Doses Administered by County Government: 27,807 (first and second)
- During this period of limited vaccine supply, the State's focus is on offering the vaccine to those at highest risk who are willing to be vaccinated.
- The Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccine was approved for emergency use authorization by the FDA during the last weekend in February.
  - The State has been informed they will be receiving 70,000 J&J vaccines this week. It is currently unclear whether the state will be receiving more in the immediate weeks to come.
  - We have been informed that we will be receiving 1500 Johnson and Johnson vaccines from this initial shipment.
- In keeping with the Governor's stated goals for this vaccine, and recognizing the additional flexibility which a "one shot" vaccine provides, the County will be utilizing this shipment

primarily to address “at-risk” populations as well as those who have as of yet not had access to the vaccine – including working with community groups, homebound seniors, and those without access to technology to ensure equitable distribution.

- Information about the number of doses administered in the State and demographic information can be found on the State [COVID Dashboard](#).

### **COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout – Megasites**

- There are six state coordinated “Megasites” in New Jersey which will immediately be in position to vaccinate front-line healthcare workers and then continue vaccinations in accordance with the State Phasing, dependent upon the supply of vaccine to New Jersey.
- Middlesex County in partnership with the State of New Jersey and RWJBarnabas Health (RWJBH) is operating a COVID-19 vaccine mega-site in **Edison Township at the [New Jersey Convention & Exposition Center](#)** with the capacity to administer up to 2,400 vaccine doses per day to qualified individuals as per the [State’s phasing plan](#).
  - The Middlesex County Megasite is open Monday through Friday from 8am-4pm and is located at 97 Sunfield Ave, Edison, NJ 08837.
- This site is receiving a direct allocation from the State of New Jersey separate and apart from the County allocation of vaccine.
- Information to register for this site is available at [www.middlesexcountynj.gov/covid19](http://www.middlesexcountynj.gov/covid19) or directly through the RWJBH website: [rwjbh.org/covid19vaccine](http://rwjbh.org/covid19vaccine)

### **COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout – County Program**

- Registration and reservation for all County sites will be taking place through the New Jersey Vaccine Scheduling System (NJVSS), a State system that facilitates registration and appointment reservations across New Jersey.
  - This site enables you to register for the vaccine regardless of your phase; the NJVSS will then notify you when your phase has been approved to begin receiving the vaccine and appointments are available.
  - Please note, due to the limited number of vaccines available each day, appointments are scheduled on a first-come, first-serve basis and are not rebooked for cancellations or no shows.
  - Registrants of the vaccine will not have the option to select the vaccine-maker of their choice, vaccines are strictly predicated on supply provided by the federal government.
- Second dose scheduling for all County sites is being handled as follows:
  - All individuals who received a first dose of the vaccine at one of Middlesex County’s vaccination clinics, will receive an automatic email notification from NJVSS regarding an appointment for a second dose. These notifications are being sent within approximately one week after the first dose appointment and include the date, time, and location of the second dose appointment.
  - Residents DO NOT need to schedule a second dose by going back into NJVSS.
- As additional vaccine is received, the County will continue with our vaccination campaign for eligible persons on a predetermined schedule across the following locations which can be viewed through the NJVSS:
  - The Heldrich Hotel and Conference Center, 10 Livingston Avenue, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

- Monroe Township Senior Center, 12 Halsey Reed Road, Monroe Township, NJ 08831
- East Brunswick Community Arts Center, 721 Cranbury Road, East Brunswick, NJ 08816
- Middlesex County Office of Health Services, 1 Ericsson Drive, Piscataway, NJ 08854
- Middlesex County Fire Academy, 1001 Fire Academy Dr, Sayreville, NJ 08872
- Middlesex County Vocational and Technical School – Perth Amboy Campus, 457 High St, Perth Amboy, NJ 08861
- *Please encourage your constituents not to call these locations directly, but to call 732-745-3100 with questions or visit [www.middlesexcountynj.gov/covid19](http://www.middlesexcountynj.gov/covid19)*
- All County Sites will adhere to the State Phasing system and augment the existing State and Federal distribution methods described above. **All County operated sites are limited to Middlesex County residents.**
- To schedule an appointment at one of Middlesex County's six additional sites, please visit: [www.middlesexcountynj.gov/covid19](http://www.middlesexcountynj.gov/covid19) or the [New Jersey Vaccine Scheduling System \(NJVSS\)](#),

### **COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout – Pharmacies & Other Locations**

- As of February 12, 2021, through the Federal Pharmacy Partnership, CVS and Rite Aid have begun making vaccines available by appointment at NJ locations. CVS began vaccinating at 27 Stores, while Rite-Aid began vaccinating at around 70 stores across New Jersey.
- Pharmacies place vaccine orders through the Federal Government and receive a direct shipment which is separate and apart from the County allocation of vaccine. To view a full list of vaccine locations across the state and within Middlesex County, [click here](#).
- CVS
  - Locations in Middlesex County include East Brunswick and Edison
  - Walk-in vaccinations without an appointment will not be provided
  - For more information and/or to make an appointment, go to <https://www.cvs.com/immunizations/covid-19-vaccine>
- Rite Aid
  - Locations include: New Brunswick, North Brunswick, Fords, Perth Amboy, Highland Park, Parlin, and both Edison locations
  - Appointments may be made at <http://ritea.id/newjersey>
- Pharmacies offering vaccinations are required to abide by the State's Vaccine Phasing plan and individuals without health insurance or whose insurance does not provide coverage of COVID-19 are eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine at no cost.

### **Common NJVSS Issues**

- **Unfortunately, the County is aware of the repeated technical issues that the State of New Jersey's Vaccine Scheduling System is experiencing. We also understand the continuous frustration and inconvenience this has caused for users. While we do not have control over NJVSS, we can assure you that Middlesex County is working around the clock with the State of New Jersey to do all that we can to help residents receive their vaccine in a timely manner.**
  - Some residents have reported the NJVSS does not recognize them as Middlesex County residents and thus prevents them from scheduling at our sites. The New Jersey Department of Health recently upgraded the NJVSS to address this issue which was primarily due to typos or errors in the "County" field when residents signed up – including

turning this field into a “drop down” to alleviate future typo errors. Residents who are still subject to this issue may reach out to the State’s COVID-19 Vaccine Call Center at 1-855-568-0545, where representatives there can assist them with verifying their registration data.

- Some residents have reported that they believe based upon their combination of factors entered they were placed into the wrong “Phase”. Residents subject to this issue may reach out to the State’s COVID-19 Vaccine Call Center at 1-855-568-0545, where representatives there can assist them with verifying their registration data.

### **COVID-19 Vaccine Background Information**

- COVID-19 vaccines help our bodies develop immunity to the virus that causes COVID-19 without us having to get the illness. Different types of vaccines work in different ways to offer protection.
- Both the [Pfizer-BioNTech](#) and [Moderna](#) vaccines are messenger [RNA vaccines \(mRNA\)](#), which **when injected instruct our cells how to make a protein—or even just a piece of a protein—that triggers an immune response inside our bodies.** That immune response, which produces antibodies, is what protects us from getting infected if the real virus enters our bodies.
- The [Johnson & Johnson](#) COVID-19 vaccine is a [viral vector vaccine](#). In viral vector vaccines, a gene unique to the virus being targeted is added to the viral vector. For COVID-19 vaccines, this gene codes for the spike protein, which is only found on the surface of SARS-CoV-2. The viral vector is used to shuttle this gene into a human cell. Once inside a cell, the viral vector uses this gene and the cell’s machinery to produce the spike protein and display it on the cell’s surface.
  - Once displayed on the cell’s surface, the protein (or antigen) causes the immune system to begin producing antibodies and activating T-cells to fight off what it thinks is an infection. These antibodies are specific to the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which means the immune system is primed to protect against future infection.
- COVID-19 vaccines that are authorized for use have gone through clinical trials involving tens of thousands of participants to determine their [safety and efficacy](#). Clinical trials of all vaccines must first show they are safe and effective before any vaccine can be authorized or approved for use, including COVID-19 vaccines. **The known and potential benefits of a COVID-19 vaccine must outweigh the known and potential risks of the vaccine for use under what is known as an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA).**
- Getting COVID-19 may offer some natural protection, known as immunity. Current evidence suggests that reinfection with the virus that causes COVID-19 is uncommon in the 90 days after initial infection. However, experts don’t know for sure how long this protection lasts, and the risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 far outweighs any benefits of natural immunity. [COVID-19 vaccination will help protect you by creating an antibody \(immune system\) response without having to experience sickness.](#)
- The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are given as an injection into the muscle and as a series of two shots. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is two doses given 21 days apart and the Moderna vaccine is two doses given 28 days apart.
- The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is given as a single-shot injection into the muscle.
- COVID-19 vaccines will not give you COVID-19.
- **COVID-19 vaccines will not cause you to test positive on COVID-19 viral tests.** Vaccines won’t cause you to test positive on viral tests, which are used to see if you have a current infection.
- [After receiving an injection](#) of a COVID-19 vaccine, you will be observed for 15 minutes by healthcare staff to monitor any side effects. Observation may be longer (30 minutes) if you have a history of anaphylaxis.
  - Like many vaccines, a COVID-19 vaccine may cause some temporary discomfort. In addition to a sore arm, side effects of the vaccines may include tiredness, headache,

muscle pain, chills, joint pain, fever, injection site swelling, injection site redness, nausea, feeling unwell, and swollen lymph nodes.

- The **Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for persons 16 years of age and older** under the FDA's Emergency Use Authorization, however the **Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines are recommended for individuals 18 years and older**. Not all sites administer both vaccines, so it is important to check with your vaccination site before scheduling a visit to ensure you are eligible.
- **Individuals who are pregnant and those in an immunocompromised state (weakened immune system) from solid organ transplant are also eligible** but should follow CDC guidance and first discuss vaccination with their medical provider before receiving the vaccine.
- Wearing masks and social distancing help reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus or spreading it to others, **but these measures are not enough**. Vaccines will work with your immune system so it will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed.

### **COVID-19 Safety Protocols:**

- Cover your mouth and nose with a mask when around others, stay at least 6 feet away from others, avoid crowds, and wash your hands often. **The combination of getting vaccinated and following CDC's recommendations to protect yourself and others will offer the best protection from COVID-19.**
- On February 10, the CDC issued updated recommendations on how to maximize the protection that masks provide. Correct and consistent mask use is important to prevent getting and spreading COVID-19. This includes making sure that the mask fits snugly against the face (covering nose and mouth) and the mask has multiple layers of material (either multiple layers of fabric or a disposable mask underneath a cloth mask).