



SYNOPSIS

Committee: Health, Environment, and Technology

City Council Resolution: 21-0003R

Informational Hearing - Baltimore's COVID-19 Vaccination Plan

Sponsor: Councilmember McCray, et al

Introduced: January 11, 2021

Purpose:

For the purpose of inviting representatives from the Baltimore City Health Department, Baltimore's healthcare community, and other interested parties before the Baltimore City Council to discuss Baltimore's COVID-19 vaccination plan.

Effective: Upon enactment

AGENCY REPORTS

Baltimore City Health Department

ANALYSIS

The resolution invites the Baltimore City Health Department, Baltimore's healthcare community, and other stakeholders to discuss Baltimore's COVID-19 vaccination plan. Specifically, the resolution calls for a thorough explanation of the Health Department's plan for the distribution of the vaccines to residents, including its plan for engaging lower-income communities and addressing the concerns many residents have about the safety and reliability of the vaccines. Additionally, it calls for discussion of whether new strains of the virus may impact the effectiveness of the vaccines and the vaccination plan.

Approved COVID-19 Vaccines

In December of 2020, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued emergency use authorizations for two COVID-19 vaccines developed by Pfizer and Moderna, respectively. The Pfizer vaccine requires two shots, 21 days apart, is recommended for people aged 16 years and older, and is reportedly 95 percent effective at preventing COVID-19 illness. The Moderna vaccine requires two shots, 28 days apart, is recommended for people aged 18 years and older, and is reportedly 94.1 percent effective at preventing COVID-19 illness.

Both of the approved vaccines are messenger RNA vaccines (mRNA). mRNA vaccines teach the body's own cells how to make a protein that triggers an immune response. That immune response produces antibodies that protect the recipient from getting infected if the real virus enters their body. The mRNA does not affect or interact with the vaccine recipient's DNA.

The potential side effects of both vaccines are similar and include chills, tiredness, and headache, as well as pain, swelling, and redness in the arm where it was injected. The side effects are usually mild to moderate and last only a few days. Because of rare severe allergic reactions to the COVID-19 vaccines, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has recommended that anyone who had a severe allergic reaction to any ingredient in the currently available COVID-19 vaccines should not get either of the vaccines. Additionally, the CDC recommends that anyone who had a severe allergic reaction after getting the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine should not get the second dose.

Vaccine Distribution

The federal government allocates COVID-19 vaccines to each state for distribution. Maryland is currently receiving approximately 10,000 vaccines per day. The vaccines are administered to eligible individuals through local health departments, employers, and healthcare providers.

Maryland's COVID-19 vaccination plan is divided into three phases. Phase I is focused on those at highest risk of developing complications from COVID-19 and those in critical workforce/infrastructure industries. Phase 1 is further broken down into three sub-phases:

- Phase 1A includes healthcare workers, residents and staff of nursing homes, first responders, public safety, corrections
- Phase 1B adds assisted living, independent living, behavioral health and developmentally disabled group homes, and other congregate facilities; adults age 75 and older; and education and continuity of government
- Phase 1C adds adults age 65-74 and essential workers in lab services, agriculture, manufacturing, postal service, etc.

Phase 2 will expand eligibility to adults 16-64 at increased risk of severe COVID-19 illness due to comorbidities and essential workers in critical utilities, transportation, food service, etc. Phase 3 will expand eligibility to the general population. As of January 25, 2021, Maryland is in Phase 1C of its distribution plan.

As of January 25, 2021, Maryland reported that it had distributed 667,275 vaccine doses of which 372,937 had been administered. 330,709 people in the state (5.47 percent of the population) have received the first dose and 42,228 people (0.698 percent of the population) have received the second dose. In Baltimore City, 31,189 people (5.255 percent of the population) have received the first dose and 6,060 people (1.021 percent of the population) have received the second dose.

On January 25, 2021, the Baltimore Sun reported that early data is raising concerns that African American and Latino residents in Maryland are being vaccinated at disproportionately low rates. According to the article “Only about 16% of the first doses of the vaccine administered in Maryland for which race data is available have gone to African Americans, and 4.6% have gone to Latino people. Those groups represent 31% and 11% of the population, respectively.”

New COVID-19 Strains

Several new variants of the COVID-19 virus have been identified globally, and some of those have been found in the U.S. and Maryland. According to the CDC, the new variants seem to spread more easily and quickly than other variants. Currently, there is no evidence that these variants cause more severe illness or increased risk of death, but an increase in the number of cases will put more strain on healthcare resources, lead to more hospitalizations, and potentially more deaths. The CDC and other public health agencies are currently evaluating whether the new variants will impact the effectiveness of existing treatments and vaccines.


ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Fiscal Note: None

Information Source(s):

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Information about the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/Pfizer-BioNTech.html>
- CDC, Information about the Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/Moderna.html>
- CDC, COVID-19 Vaccines and Allergic Reactions: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/allergic-reaction.html>

- CDC, New COVID-19 Variants: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/transmission/variant.html>
 - Maryland COVID-19 Vaccination Dashboard: <https://coronavirus.maryland.gov/#Vaccine>
 - Baltimore Sun, Red flag raised about race disparity in Maryland's early coronavirus vaccine rollout data: <https://www.baltimoresun.com/coronavirus/bs-md-vaccine-rollout-disparity-20210125-d2mwyfe7evfthgeoswe54tsb54-story.html>
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