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March 5, 2021

New Mexico's Veterans Encouraged to Enroll In Both the VA and DOH COVID-19 Vaccine Programs

SANTA FE--"We are asking New Mexico's veterans to register for both the New Mexico Department of Health and the New Mexico VA Health Care System vaccine programs."

This is one of the key points made today by New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) Healthcare Program Director Jemia Warner in a live Facebook discussion hosted by DVS to talk about the availability and procedures for veterans to get a COVID-19 vaccine.

Joining director Warner in the discussion were New Mexico VA Health Care System

(NMVAHCS) Director Andrew Welch, NMVAHCS Chief Nurse Cassandra Valdez, NMVAHCS Vaccine Coordinator Dr. Deidre Hofinger, and New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) Communications Director Matt Bieber.

In the discussion, DVS Healthcare Director Warner pointed out that veterans in New Mexico have these two state and federal vaccine program options available to them. But she, along with NMDOH Communications Director Bieber, and NMVACS Director Welch, emphasized that veterans must register if they want to use either program.

Veterans who choose to go with the NMVAHCS must also be signed up for VA health care.

NMDOH Vaccine Program

The NMDOH vaccine program, said Bieber, offers the Moderna, Pfizer, and Johnson & Johnson vaccines and are available for all registered New Mexicans through a phased-in process for the following registered population segments:

- Hospital personnel
- residents/staff of long-term care facilities
- medical first responders
- congregate-setting workers & residents in:
 - homeless shelters, correctional facilities, residential treatment centers, community homes
- people providing direct medical/other in-person services
- home-based healthcare and hospice workers
- anyone 75 years old or older
- anyone 16 years old or older at risk of COVID complications

Registration by anyone in these eligible groups can be done online at <https://vaccinenm.org>. NMDOH will then notify you when a vaccine will be available for you in your area. The rest of the population is being phased in as quickly as possible, said Bieber.

“All three vaccines have been tremendously effective in preventing hospitalizations and deaths nationwide,” he said. “So DOH is encouraging veterans to accept the first vaccine offered to them.”

According to Bieber, there are also vaccines available through private institutions not affiliated with NMDOH or VA and have their own vaccine protocols.

NMVAHCS

The NMVAHCS is offering the Pfizer vaccine, and has begun receiving shipments of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which will be quickly incorporated it into its vaccine supply.

Veterans who are already enrolled in VA health care and who choose the NMVAHCS vaccine program must register for an appointment by calling (505) 265-1711 and then choosing among four available extensions:

- 3915
- 3916
- 2912
- 2917

Veterans can also call the above number to arrange for enrollment into the VA health care system.

As with the NMDOH procedure, the NMVAHCS will contact the pre-registered veteran when their vaccine is ready. Veterans 50-years of age and older, and those with COVID risk factors are currently being vaccinated—with a phase-in of the rest of the veteran population to follow once a large segment of this group is vaccinated.

The bulk of the vaccines are being administered at the Albuquerque Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center---via a drive-through clinic at a temporary “Camp Murphy Tent Hospital” established outside the main hospital building.

“We found that this drive-through system has been a very safe, very organized way to vaccinate our patients,” said NMVAHCS Director Welch. “It is the best way to keep everyone spaced at safe distances. We may revisit this policy in the future—but for now, this is the system we prefer.”

Director Welch also said that the 13 NMVAHCS-managed CBOCs have begun to receive vaccines—but that veterans must call the previously-mentioned main number to make an appointment.

The NMVAHCS will then notify these veterans when their vaccine will be ready for them at their closest CBOC from among the following CBOCs in: Alamogordo, Artesia, Española, Farmington, Gallup, Las Vegas, Raton, Rio Rancho, Santa Fe, Silver City, Taos, Truth or Consequences, or Durango (Colorado).

The following three CBOC’s are not managed by the NMVAHCS: Clovis (under the jurisdiction of the Amarillo, TX VA Medical Center), Hobbs (Big Spring, TX), and Las Cruces (El Paso VA Medical Center). Veterans who call the main NMVAHCS number will be referred to those VA health care systems.

“Again, we strongly encourage New Mexico’s veterans to register with both the DOH and New Mexico VA vaccine programs,” said DVS Health Care Director Warner. “But when you are contacted by one program, we ask that you then call the other one to take your name off that list...so that a spot can open for someone else.”

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