

COVID Update December 11, 2020

Nationally, COVID cases set a new record for new cases in the past week with 1.5 million cases reported over seven days, and record hospitalizations at 106,688 (the previous hospitalization record for the US was less than 60,000 at the peak in July.) Deaths reached a record 3,124 on Wednesday.

In SC, new COVID-19 cases broke records on multiple days, with the upstate continuing to have the most cases. The seven-day rolling average for SC is now above 2,000 for the first time, with test positivity consistently above 20%.

Governor McMaster has again called for full day, full week public school attendance but many local districts, including in Greenville County, will not implement it due to difficulty maintaining safe distancing.

The FDA review panel recommended yesterday that the Pfizer vaccine be granted emergency use authorization, so it is assumed the FDA will grant that authorization today and that shipment of the vaccine will happen soon. Moderna has also applied for the emergency use authorization, the FDA will review the data for their vaccine next week.

Gov. McMaster has at this point approved distribution of the vaccine to Phase 1A level recipients. SC will receive 200,000 to 300,000 doses of vaccine in the first round, which will NOT be enough to cover all the Phase 1A designees, so risk stratification will need to happen even within the different phase levels, concentrating on high risk, essential health care workers first in Phase 1A.

Phase 1A: Physicians, nurses, physical therapists, medical students, nursing home patients and workers, medical personnel in jails and detention centers, medical and emergency first responders, and home health and hospice workers.

Phase 1B: People in services with a high risk of exposure and those with high medical risks. That includes first responders including fire and police; critical utilities such as water, transportation, water removal, SCDOT workers, agribusiness, food processing workers, and correctional facilities; people over the age of 75 and persons with two or more of the following conditions: cancer, chronic kidney disease, COPD, diabetes, heart disease, HIV/AIDS, obesity, pregnancy, sickle cell disease.

Phase 2: Pharmacists, grocery store workers, food service workers, service industry workers, postal workers, public transit, K-12 school employees, school bus drivers, higher education instructors, child care workers, people 65 and older and person with at least one of these conditions: (those listed above) as well as asthma, cerebro vascular disease, cystic fibrosis, hypertension, liver disease, and people who are immuno compromised.

Phase 3: General population not included in the above groups

People who get the Pfizer vaccine will have to wait 21 days between doses, while people who get the Moderna vaccine will need to wait 28 days. The second dose is often associated with significant arm soreness, fatigue, and muscle aches, to the point that short staffed organizations are advised to 'stagger' the doses among staff to prevent critical personnel shortages.

Although the vaccines have not been tested in pregnancy, it is recommended that they be offered to pregnant women in high risk jobs as the benefit probably outweighs the risk. Individuals who have already had COVID are also advised to take the vaccine but to wait 90 days after the illness. The vaccines have not been tested in children.