



St. Mary's COVID vaccine update for Monday, Feb. 8, 2021

Contact: Mark Ralston

706.389.3897 mrалston@stmarysathens.org

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

St. Mary's continues to be excited about the COVID-19 vaccine. We are confident it is safe and effective. We are honored to play our part in the nation's largest vaccine rollout and appreciate the patience of our communities as we join other health care and public health organizations in navigating the current vaccine supply challenges. Over the last several days, we've heard from many community members who are interested in more information and we wanted to share some updates:

Vaccine information

1. **Vaccine supplies are still limited from federal and state governments.** Demand far exceeds supply worldwide. We currently do not have vaccine supplies to schedule any new first dose appointments but are prepared to administer more vaccines when supplies are available. St. Mary's continues to work with the State of Georgia to obtain vaccine, but the State faces a huge challenge in fairly and equitably distributing vaccine. Georgia receives 146,000 doses a week to serve a population of 2 million who are currently eligible. For example, St. Mary's recently requested 2,000 additional doses but received 100 due to limited supply availability. All 100 of those vaccines are committed for second doses to complete treatments. We appreciate the work state and federal authorities are doing to improve supplies and urge patience from our communities.
2. **All workers in clinical and front-line roles have priority to receive the vaccine.** To help keep everyone safe and meet existing patient care needs, we are first working to complete vaccination of front-line health care workers. This will help protect them so that we can later expand access to more people. In accord with State guidance and as supplies permit, we are making appointments only for our colleagues and first responders (EMS, fire and law enforcement) in five core counties in our service area.
3. **We're getting every dose we can, and following state direction on distribution.** We are making plans to vaccinate as many community members as possible as soon as supplies are provided, in accordance with State priority categories. As soon as supplies allow, we plan to expand our vaccine clinics to our Medical Group patients age 65 and over.
4. **One patient = two appointments.** Because the currently authorized COVID-19 vaccines need two doses to provide maximum protection (the second dose is given 21 days later for the Pfizer vaccine and 28 days later for the Moderna vaccine), we schedule two appointments on the same call.
5. **Larger quantities of vaccine supplies are coming.** We are confident that national and state plans to improve vaccine distribution will be effective and know that everyone is working hard

to make that happen. The goal is that everyone who wants to be vaccinated will be able to receive it over the coming months. We are also excited that additional COVID vaccines are under development and will possibly add to the available inventory needed to meet current and future demand.

6. **The vaccine has been well-received and well-tolerated.** Overall, our staff and medical staff have been receptive to being vaccinated. The vast majority of side effects we are seeing are consistent with those reported in clinical trials such as pain and redness at the injection site, feeling tired, muscle and joint aches, headaches, and low-grade fever. Most side effects resolve within 24-48 hours and those ages 55 and older reported fewer side effects.
7. **We are watching the rise of COVID variants closely.** We continue to follow experts at Trinity Health, CDC and WHO as they assess the impact of these new variants. So far, it appears existing vaccines continue to be effective at preventing severe illness. Reducing the rate of infection would also reduce the speed at which new variants arise, so please continue preventative measures such as masking, maintaining social distance, handwashing, and staying away from others when not feeling well.

Local COVID information

1. **Case numbers appear to be declining.** We are seeing a reduction in COVID case numbers across our region over the past 14 days. We are hopeful the decline is due in part to better compliance with community precautions since the holidays ended.
2. **COVID-19 hospitalizations remain high but are easing.** Currently, all area hospitals are near capacity, especially for critical care. Even so, the situation has improved compared to about two weeks ago, when area hospitals were frequently over capacity. Patients with COVID-19 continue to make up nearly a quarter of inpatients at St. Mary's Hospital in Athens and about half of inpatients at Sacred Heart and Good Samaritan hospitals in Lavonia and Greensboro
3. **Our hospitals are safe and open.** We continue to provide all services and urge everyone to continue receiving care when you need it, from routine wellness checkups to emergency care. Our work to keep you safe includes entrance screening for everyone entering our facilities, mandatory masking, limited inpatient visiting, and virtual visits with our St. Mary's Medical Group providers.

Next steps

We will continue vaccinating our staff, medical staff and community first responders as supplies permit.

As our supplies improve, we will expand our vaccination clinics to include more people within the State's 1A priority tier.

We urge everyone to continue following standard COVID-19 safety precautions, even after being vaccinated: wear a mask, maintain social distance, wash hands, avoid gatherings, and stay home if sick.

Thank you for your continued patience, support, and commitment. Follow future updates on our COVID-19 webpage at www.stmaryshealthcaresystem.org. Together, we will end the pandemic.