



St. Mary's President & CEO addresses COVID vaccine questions

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Athens, Ga. – St. Mary's is receiving numerous questions about COVID-19 vaccinations. We want to answer those questions as best we can in this fast-changing situation. The following reflects the best information we have at this moment.

First, most hospitals in Georgia – including all three hospitals in our system – are experiencing the highest number of COVID patients we have seen since the pandemic started. These COVID patients are in addition to our normal patient volumes, which are typically at their peak in the winter months. At the same time, more staff than ever before are out sick due to community exposure. Our team has been outstanding in working through this situation, but it is very challenging, and they are tired. We continue our commitment to meet the health care needs of our community and we will continue to prioritize our resources to care for patients who are ill from COVID and other diseases. We need the community to continue taking actions that prevent the spread of the disease.

The vaccines hold tremendous promise to be the light at the end of the tunnel, and we are encouraged that so many people want to be vaccinated. We share their confidence that the vaccines that have been granted FDA emergency use approval are safe and effective. We urge everyone to get vaccinated when your priority level opens up.

Briefly, here are key points we want to share with our communities.

Our hospitals have received only limited supplies of vaccine. Currently, per state guidance, we are prioritizing our colleagues and medical staff members. It is essential that our frontline staff receive protection as soon as possible so that we can continue meeting the needs of our patients and community.

The state has directed a limited expansion. Per the Governor's guidance, we are also ramping up our vaccination efforts to make vaccine available to designated essential workers outside of the hospital setting: EMS personnel, firefighters, law enforcement officers, and first responders. We will be reaching out to these groups in the next few days.

Most people will be vaccinated through community partners. All of us in healthcare are pitching in to fight the pandemic. As vaccine becomes more widely available, partner organizations such as pharmacies and clinics will play a larger role. These are the locations where most people will be vaccinated in the weeks ahead.

The Health District can help if you meet current criteria. If you are 65 or over, you now meet the Georgia Department of Public Health's criteria for vaccination. Please contact your local Health District for information on how to get vaccinated.

- Athens area, including Greene County: <https://publichealthathens.com/wp/>
- District 2, including Franklin, Hart and Stephens counties: <http://phdistrict2.org/>
- District 5-2, including Putnam County:
<https://northcentralhealthdistrict.org/coronavirus/>

Our hospitals are open and providing care. We understand the news about the pandemic around the state and nationally may be alarming. Please be assured that while we are stressed by the current situation, St. Mary's hospitals are open and working to provide care for our community. You may encounter a longer wait in our Emergency Departments, but we will triage you and provide appropriate care as soon as possible. Please do not delay seeking care.

Keep your guard up. It will take time for the vaccine rollout to impact the pandemic. Especially with COVID numbers so high, we need everyone to continue wearing a mask in public, maintaining 6 feet or more of physical distance from people who don't live in your household, avoiding large gatherings, washing your hands, and staying home if sick except to seek medical care.

Blessings,

D. Montez Carter, FACHE

President and CEO

St. Mary's Health Care System®

