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Gov. Beshear: Long-Term Care Facilities Receive First COVID-19 Vaccines

Historic public health campaign introduces vaccines with some of the commonwealth's most vulnerable citizens

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Dec. 21, 2020) – Today, Gov. Andy Beshear announced that several long-term care facilities in the commonwealth began administering the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine.

On Monday, the Governor showed [images from the first long-term care residents](#) in Kentucky to get a shot of the coronavirus vaccine authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Representatives from Walgreens joined the Governor, Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) leaders and long-term care advocates during a virtual news conference.

“Today we celebrate another great and hopeful day in our battle against COVID-19,” Gov. Beshear said. “Long-term care residents and the front-line staff who care for them are beginning to receive the life-saving Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Since two-thirds of coronavirus deaths in Kentucky come from long-term care facilities,

these vaccinations – a modern-day medical miracle – have the real potential to save lives and significantly reduce COVID-19’s burden on our health care system.”

The vaccinations follow a recommendation from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, which advises the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), that the initial phase of the COVID-19 vaccination program should be offered to health care personnel and residents of long-term care facilities. Most assisted living facilities and skilled nursing facilities have enrolled in the federal [Pharmacy Partnership for Long-Term Care Program](#) implementing COVID-19 vaccination. Walgreens and CVS are providing services to the facilities, including follow-up visits.

Walgreens pharmacy team members will provide COVID-19 vaccinations in approximately 800 long-term care facilities across Kentucky and 11 additional states the week of Dec. 21, including many in rural and urban areas.

Long-term care facilities where residents began receiving the vaccine today from Walgreens included Signature Healthcare of Summerfield and Signature Healthcare at Jefferson Manor Rehab & Wellness Center, in Louisville, and Sunrise Manor Nursing Home in Hodgenville.

“Walgreens is very proud to be a part of this historic milestone to begin administering Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine to our most vulnerable populations in Kentucky and across the country,” said John Standley, president of Walgreens. “With more than a decade of experience administering various vaccines, we have the deep expertise to support this unprecedented effort to allow our nation to emerge from this pandemic.”

CHFS Secretary Eric Friedlander described the day’s events as “gratifying, the beginning of an end, but with the finish line still at a considerable distance.

“After months of battling the pandemic, which has made a tragic and indelible impact on Kentucky’s seniors, given that over 66% of COVID-19-related deaths have been among residents of these facilities, today is as unforgettable as March 6, 2020.”

That is when the first case of the novel coronavirus was reported in Kentucky.

“If there’s one thing this pandemic has taught us, it’s that what happens to one of us happens to all of us,” Friedlander said.

Walgreens and CVS are supporting Operation Warp Speed, together with the CDC, the Department of Health and Human Services and state and local governments, to administer vaccines as quickly as possible to Americans. With more than 9,000 store locations across the nation, Walgreens pharmacy team members are embedded in their communities. They will continue to play a critical role in education and immunizations as vaccines become available more broadly in 2021.

“Today’s rollout is the culmination of months of internal planning and demonstrates how the private sector can use its expertise to help solve some of our most critical challenges,” said Larry J. Merlo, president and chief executive officer of CVS Health. “I’m grateful for the herculean efforts of everyone involved, including our health care professionals who will be deployed throughout the country to bring peace of mind to long-term care facility residents, staff and their loved ones.”

“After these grueling months, I cannot think of a better Christmas gift for our residents, staff and families of Kentucky’s long-term care facilities than delivery of the COVID-19 vaccine. The beginning of the end is in sight, and we are thrilled that the first vaccines will begin this week for our residents and our incredibly hardworking staff,” said Timothy L. Veno, president and CEO of LeadingAge Kentucky, a statewide organization that advocates for long-term care, assisted living and senior housing providers.

Veno added, “The \$114 million CARES Act investment made a huge difference in reducing illness and deaths in Kentucky’s long-term care facilities. This critical financial support launched the robust state-supported COVID-19 testing program, deployment of clinical support teams, a COVID-19 clinical support hotline staffed by Norton Healthcare and mobilization of the Kentucky National Guard. We are grateful for the ongoing support of Gov. Beshear, Secretary Friedlander and the tireless work of the entire team at CHFS for delivering services that protected our residents, our staff and their families.”

The CDC estimates completion of vaccine distribution to long-term care facility residents within the next four-to-five weeks.

Beverly Edwards, executive director of the Episcopal Church Home in Louisville, which will receive vaccinations on Wednesday said, “During the first eight months of the pandemic, none of our residents at Episcopal Church Home tested positive for the coronavirus. However, as the virus spread more rapidly through the broader community, over the past month, I have witnessed the impact that this horrible virus has had on our residents and staff and it is simply heartbreaking. For this reason, I am grateful that our residents and staff will be among the first within our community to be inoculated for the coronavirus.

“Personally, I am excited to receive the vaccination and I encourage everyone to take it to help our elders. Everyone has individuals in their lives that mean the world to them. On Wednesday, I will take the vaccination for those that mean the world to me; my residents, staff, family and friends.”

CHFS Inspector General Adam Mather described the vaccine campaign as “impactful.” He expressed encouragement with reaching today’s milestone.

“The Commonwealth of Kentucky has taken bold and decisive steps to curb the impacts of the pandemic, starting with Gov. Beshear’s executive order that paused visitation for months,” Mather said. “This led to a discernible slowing of the virus and contributed to fewer deaths than would have otherwise been the case.”

Additionally, a long-term care advisory task force was assembled to provide guidance from a range of professionals, including geriatricians, physicians, eldercare advocates and ethicists.

Long-term care staff were trained on infection-prevention. CARES Act funding helped connect long-term care residents with the people they care about via electronic tablets, and continuity of care received a boost from a heavier reliance on telehealth.

Strike teams, staffed by the Department of Veterans Affairs, were mobilized. Reserves of personal protective equipment were increased. CHFS supported the Personal Care Assistants Program, working with the Kentucky Community and Technical College System to increase Certified Nursing Assistant testing capacity.

For more information on the state’s response to COVID-19 visit, kycovid19.ky.gov.
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