



Vaccine Operational Interim Guidance for First Responders

(March 3, 2021)

Background

This operational guidance includes recommendations intended to help public safety leaders support their employees in getting vaccinated, as vaccine supply becomes available.

North Carolina will open vaccinations to the remaining first responders who did not fall into Group 1 starting March 3, 2021. **This means that all first responders will now be eligible to receive a vaccination on March 3rd. However, because of very limited vaccine supply, this does not guarantee that first responder employees will be able to get an appointment or get vaccinated as of that date.**

1. Which first responders are eligible to get vaccinated as part of Group 3?

Starting March 3, 2021, North Carolina will open vaccinations to the following groups of first responders who are working on-site or anticipate a return to an in-person work setting, including staff who:

First Responders in the following settings:

First Responders
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Law Enforcement Personnel• Fire & Rescue Personnel• 911 Telecommunicators

Individuals who work in public safety but are not required to work in-person, will be able to be vaccinated as the state moves to Group 4.

It is important to note that some first responders, including emergency medical service workers, are included in the health care workers group and already eligible for vaccine as part of Group 1.

2. Where can eligible first responders get a vaccine?

Eligible employees can get vaccinated by any vaccine provider in North Carolina. Currently, vaccinations are being provided by:

- Most hospitals and health systems
- Many federally qualified health centers and community health centers
- All local health departments
- Some pharmacies, including some Walgreens locations (in partnership with the federal government)

- Some primary care providers

North Carolina has distributed vaccine to providers based on their ability and capacity to quickly administer vaccines and reach eligible populations. Because COVID-19 vaccine supply is very limited, most doctors’ offices are not yet offering vaccinations. The number of vaccine providers offering vaccines will increase as more COVID-19 vaccine doses become available in the state. You can learn which vaccine providers are near you by visiting Find a Vaccine Location (myspot.nc.gov).

3. How can first responders support their eligible employees in getting vaccinated?

There are several ways that public safety leaders can help their frontline essential employees get vaccinated. Below are three examples of models that leaders can discuss with vaccine providers in their area. Many vaccine providers have been vaccinating people for weeks and have developed processes that look different across the state. The model that your local vaccine provider can implement will depend significantly on how much vaccine and how many vaccinating staff are available. For Examples 1 and 2, the first step is for first responder leadership to reach out to a vaccine provider in their area.

Example Vaccine Models for First Responders

Example 1: Vaccine Event On-Site at Public Safety Organizations (e.g. fire station, police station, etc.)	Example 2: Vaccine Provider Hosts Special Vaccine Event for First Responders	Example 3: Support Employee Getting Vaccinated Independently
Partnership between public safety organizations and vaccine provider for on-site vaccine event. Public safety organizations can support vaccinations by scheduling appointments, organizing event logistics, and supporting event staffing.	Partnership between public safety organizations and vaccine provider who hosts special event at their clinic or other community location. Public safety organizations can support vaccinations by scheduling appointments and supporting event staffing.	An employee seeks vaccination on their own at any vaccine provider, without having to go through their employer.

Note: Because temporary reactions can occur after vaccination (e.g., headache, feeling tired and achy for a day or two after receiving the vaccine), public safety organizations should plan to stagger vaccination for their employees to avoid any critical staffing shortages. For example, all employees from a fire station should not be vaccinated on the same day if staff absences from temporary post-vaccine reactions on the following days would lead to critical staffing shortages. Please see [Appendix 1](#) for additional information.

The following are roles that public safety leaders or could play in supporting their employees to get vaccinated, depending on which model their local vaccine provider is able to implement on behalf of their staff.

Key Roles	Example 1: Vaccine Event On- Site at Public Safety Organization	Example 2: Vaccine Provider Hosts Special Vaccine Event for First Responders	Example 3: Support Employee Getting Vaccinated Independently
Initiate Employee Outreach			
Notify staff about their eligibility and encourage them to get vaccinated when it is available to them (See Appendix 1 for resources)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Share general information about how and where employees can get vaccinated (See Appendix 2 for a letter template)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Coordinate with local vaccine provider to... (see Appendix 4)			
Notify employees of reserved appointments and help schedule when possible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Provide transportation for employees to vaccination events	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Support vaccination event staffing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Organize vaccine event logistics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

4. Roles and responsibilities

Public Safety Leadership (Police Chiefs, Fire Chiefs, Sheriffs etc.)

- Initiate employee outreach steps (see details in [Appendix 2](#) and [Appendix 3](#))
 - Identify eligible employees and contractors and notify them that they are eligible for vaccination as part of Group 3.
 - Encourage your employees to take their shot when it is available to them and share resources to combat against potential misinformation on vaccines.
 - Share general information about where and how employees can get vaccinated.
 - Set expectations that supplies are limited, so employees will likely have to wait.

- Larger organizations may wish to consider reaching out to multiple vaccine providers given their larger number of employees (see details in [Appendix 4](#)).
- Identify a champion or group of champions within different groups of staff (e.g., parking enforcers, office administrators, and crime-scene investigators in the case of a police station) to encourage employees to get the vaccine when it is available. Champions may be individuals who are early adopters to get their vaccine when it is available to them and meet regularly to develop and implement strategies to promote the vaccine to their peers.

First Responder Employees (Law Enforcement Officers, Fire/Rescue Personnel, etc.)

- Talk to leadership about how they are working to help their employees access vaccination.
- Use the [Find My Vaccine Location](#) tool to find a vaccine provider near you and contact them to get an appointment. Enter your zip code to find nearby vaccine providers. You can contact the vaccine provider(s) directly to confirm availability and schedule appointments. Many vaccine providers will update their website to indicate when they are planning to open vaccinations to frontline essential workers staff.
- Call the NC COVID-19 Vaccine Help Center (1-877-490-6642).

Vaccine Providers (e.g., hospitals, local health departments, pharmacies)

- Coordinate with public safety leaders to develop partnerships with first responders who work in your county.

Appendix 1.

Data from COVID-19 vaccine trials indicate that most side effects are mild. Most occur within the first 3 days of vaccination (the day of vaccination and the following 2 days, with most occurring the day after vaccination), resolve within 1–2 days, and are more frequent and severe following the second dose. At this time, we do not know how common these symptoms may be among employees. Nonetheless, we expect that most employees who experience symptoms following vaccination will not need to miss work.

However, some employees who get vaccinated may have side effects, like fever, and might need to miss work temporarily. CDC understands concerns about potential workforce shortages resulting from vaccine side effects. Workplaces may consider staggering schedules for employees who receive vaccination so that not all employees are vaccinated on the same day.

In addition, staggering may be more important for the second dose, after which side effects seem more frequent. To help ensure continuity of operations, facilities may consider staggering vaccination for employees in the same job category or who work in the same area of a facility. Staggering vaccination for employees may cause delays in vaccinating your staff, and the decision to stagger vaccination will need to be weighed against potential inconveniences that might reduce vaccine acceptance. Facilities should evaluate their specific situation when determining their best approach. Facilities that choose to stagger vaccine administration should also ensure all

employees receive 2 doses as recommended.

Please see [CDC guidance](#) for further information.

Appendix 2.

Communications Steps: Notify Staff About Their Eligibility for Vaccination and Encourage Them to Get Vaccinated When It is Available to Them

Public safety leaders should notify employees who work on-site that they are eligible to get vaccinated starting March 3rd. However, they should set expectations with staff that just because they are eligible does not guarantee that they will be able to get an appointment or get vaccinated right away due to very limited supply of vaccines across the state.

In the meantime, leaders can talk to their employees about the importance of the vaccine for their own health and the health of their families and communities. Vaccine information should be given to employees in their [native languages](#), whenever possible, using clear language and trusted means of communication.

Public safety leaders can attend a NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) Vaccine 101 presentation so that they can help direct employees to trusted sources of information. Please submit a request using [NCDHHS's form](#) if your organization is interested in helping to organize a vaccine 101 presentation led by NCDHHS presenters.

Consider taking the following steps to educate your employees about the COVID-19 vaccine:

- Send employee letters, text messages or email blasts (see [Appendix 2](#))
- Schedule meetings with team members to learn about the COVID-19 vaccine and how they can get vaccinated. (Consider offering meetings in other languages, as appropriate, based on employee population.)
- Display posters and other printed materials in places where staff spend the most time
- Post vaccine information on your organization's social media or worksite television monitors
- Partner with trusted community leaders to promote getting your vaccine when it's your turn
- Review and share CDC's COVID-19 Communication [Toolkit](#) for Essential Workers for additional resources and materials
- Visit the [CDC guidance](#) for non-healthcare critical infrastructure employers for more tips!

Resources to share with your employees about the COVID-19 vaccine:

- **Flyers and Fact Sheets:** Print and share flyers in your community.
 - [Bilingual - Your Best Shot Against COVID-19](#)
 - Simpler Flyer – [English](#) / [Spanish](#)
 - Postcard Size Handout – [English](#) / [Spanish](#)
- **Infographic:** Use on your website and digital displays.
 - North Carolina's Vaccine Groups – [English](#) / [Spanish](#)

- **Videos:** Post on social media, play on internal displays, and share on websites and in newsletters.
 - [English Video Library / Spanish Video Library](#) featuring faith leaders, community leaders, frontline workers, older North Carolinians and more
- **Social Media Graphics:** Post on your social media channels using our [Social Media Graphics](#)
- **FAQs:** Use to answer questions that staff may have about the vaccine. Our frequently asked questions are updated weekly.
 - FAQ - English – [English](#) / [Spanish](#) (updated weekly)
- **Presentation:** Become a Vaccine Ambassador by attending a Vaccine 101 presentation. [Register now.](#)
 - Vaccine 101 Deck – [English](#) / [Spanish](#)
- **Collect and Share Stories:** Share stories of people telling why they got or plan to get the vaccine. Use this tip sheet to record and share a video or photo.
 - Tip Sheet to Record Your Vaccine Selfie – [English](#) / [Spanish](#)
- **Website:** Link to our Vaccine websites.
 - [YourSpotYourShot.nc.gov](#)
 - [Vacunate.nc.gov](#)

Appendix 3.

Communications Tool: Template Email to Eligible Employees

First Responders can customize this template email and share with employees.

Dear <NAME>,

North Carolina will open vaccinations to frontline essential employees starting Wednesday, March 3rd, 2021. **This means that first responders will be ELIGIBLE to receive a vaccination on March 3rd. However, this DOES NOT guarantee that everyone will be able to get an appointment or get vaccinated right away due to very limited vaccine supply.** Initially, some vaccine providers may be ready to vaccinate frontline essential workers as early as March 3rd, while other vaccine providers may continue to focus on vaccinating Group 1 (health care workers and long term care facility staff/residents) and Group 2 (adults ages 65 and older) if they are still experiencing significant demand from these populations.

Law enforcement are individuals working on-site to facilitate public safety, including but not limited to: police officers, firefighters, and sheriff's deputies. In your current role at <EMPLOYER NAME>, we are reaching out to inform you that you qualify as frontline essential worker, making you eligible for vaccination. However, because vaccine supplies are very limited right now, there may be a wait to schedule your appointment to get your vaccine.

We strongly recommend that you get the vaccine when it is available to you. For your information, we have included some more information about the safety and effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccinations that are currently available in the US:

- Scientists had a head start. The vaccines were built upon years of work to develop vaccines for similar viruses.

- The vaccines are tested, safe and effective. Vaccines were found to help prevent COVID-19 and are effective in preventing hospitalization and death, with no serious safety concerns noted in the clinical trials.
- You cannot get COVID-19 from the vaccine. You may have temporary reactions like a sore arm, headache, or feeling tired and achy for a day or two after receiving the vaccine.
- Take your shot at no cost. The COVID-19 vaccine is available for free, whether or not you have insurance.

Here are your next steps for getting vaccinated:

- Go to [NCDHHS Find a Vaccine Location](#), search by your zip code, and contact one of the local vaccine providers on the list; OR
- Call the NC COVID-19 Vaccine Help Center (**1-877-490-6642**) to get help finding a vaccine provider near you

[Optional text to include if your organization is partnering with a vaccine provider on a vaccine event or reserved appointments, please insert all options that are available to your employees:]

- Schedule a vaccination appointment by calling <insert phone number>; OR
- Schedule a vaccination appointment using this link <insert link>; OR
- Respond to this message indicating your interest in being vaccinated against COVID-19, and we will help you get scheduled for an appointment.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact <<insert contact person>> with questions or concerns.

Appendix 4.

Operations: Steps for Public Safety Leaders to Coordinate with Vaccine Providers

Public safety leaders that are working with vaccine provider(s) in their area to implement models 1 or 2 (see Section 4) may be able to take the following additional steps. **Before taking any of these steps below, talk to your vaccine provider(s) about what this will look like in your community.**

Coordinate with Vaccine Providers	
Notify employees of reserved appointments and help schedule when possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If your local vaccine provider is able to set aside appointments specifically for your employees, work with them to fill those slots by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Alerting employees of times/dates of appointments/events that are available to them and how they can sign up ○ Providing assistance for registration process or on-line scheduling (access to Wi-Fi, assistance with translation, email set-up) ○ Sending reminders to staff about upcoming vaccine events <p>NOTE: When helping to schedule appointments, consider that you may need to stagger employees on different days</p>

<p>Provide transportation for employees to vaccination events</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer employees transportation to and from vaccine sites • Share information about local transit authorities that can assist people needing transportation to a vaccination site <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ People who need transportation assistance to a COVID- 19 vaccine should reach out to their local transit agency (a list of local transit agencies can be found at the NC DOT website).
<p>Organize vaccine event logistics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with your local vaccine provider to determine whether a vaccine event for your staff is the right model for vaccinating your staff. If so, you can help identify a facility that has basic amenities or features, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Running water, electricity, heat/air conditioning ○ Toilet and handwashing facilities ○ Reliable cell phone service ○ Wireless internet (this is particularly important for vaccine providers to be able to register people in CVMS and do data entry) ○ Tables and chairs ○ Basic beverage and food provision for vaccinators and volunteers ○ Heavy-duty tents for shelter (if outdoor) ○ ADA accessibility • Consider using law enforcement facilities or spaces that are not currently being used for in-person instruction

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider partnering with organizations (e.g., faith organizations, community centers) that have available space for vaccine events
<p>Support vaccination event staffing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with your local vaccine provider to determine whether a vaccine event is the right model for your staff. If so, you can support vaccine events for your employees (e.g., offering volunteers who can support check-in and check-out, parking/traffic control). • Identify volunteers who can support with the following types of tasks at a vaccine event: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Scheduling vaccine appointments for your event ○ Calling and confirming appointments ○ Greeting, temperature checks, symptom screening ○ Parking and traffic control ○ Check-in table and confirmation of appointment ○ Check-out ○ Interpreters • <i>Please note: In most cases, vaccine providers (NOT community organizations) should plan to staff the following components of vaccine events: registration in CVMS, vaccine storage and handling, vaccine administration, post-vaccination monitoring, and data entry. Vaccine providers may also guide/support other activities as needed.</i>