

January 19, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

The District of Columbia is well underway with the implementation of the District of Columbia's COVID-19 Vaccination Program. The District's comprehensive approach to providing equitable access to vaccines to District residents in partnership with the District's health systems, community health centers, and pharmacies is a continuation of the District's all of community approach to responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and mitigating its impact in the District of Columbia.

As a reminder, the District is implementing its Vaccination Program based on a three phased approach. This month, DC Health released a revision of the phased approach that includes tiers in Phase 1b and 1c that better communicates the order by which certain priority groups may be expected to receive the vaccine in the District of Columbia. It also helps to clearly delineate how individuals and groups are assigned to a priority group based on 1) their risk for morbidity and mortality or 2) the role they play in preserving societal functions. For more information on the District's phases and tiers visit <https://coronavirus.dc.gov/vaccine>.

The District of Columbia advanced to Phase 1b Tier 1 on January 11, 2021 and DC residents age 65 and older became eligible for vaccination. While demand for the vaccine continues to exceed supply due to the limited number of vaccines the District receives from the federal government on a weekly basis, DC Health is concerned about the number of eligible DC residents who are not considering vaccination at this time due to a lack of counseling from their healthcare provider.

I am writing to appeal to you to counsel your patients on the benefits of the COVID-19 vaccine. In the past week, I have encountered several healthcare workers and seniors who are delaying COVID-19 vaccination until their personal physician advises them that it is safe to do so. Your role as a physician in our community can have a tremendous impact on increasing uptake of the vaccine, particularly in communities of color.

For providers serving DC Medicaid beneficiaries, the Department of Health Care Finance (DHCF) supports good disease management practice and encourages providers to schedule appointments with patients at high risk of illness or death from COVID-19 to conduct COVID-19 vaccine counseling. As part of a routine primary care or evaluation and management visit (e.g. CPT codes 99201-99205, 99211-99215 as applicable) physicians and other qualified providers can bill for counseling and educating their patients to support medical treatment. These services can be deliverable via telemedicine, under both Medicaid fee-for-service and Medicaid managed care delivery systems with GT modifier for telemedicine visits and place of service code "02" if the beneficiary is receiving services in their home. Medicaid providers can access more information on

Medicaid reimbursement for COVID-19 vaccine administration at <https://dhcf.dc.gov/node/1477761>.

DC Health has developed fact sheets and compiled provider resources to assist you in counseling and educating patients about the benefits and risk of COVID-19 vaccination. Toolkits and other related COVID-19 vaccination materials are available at <https://coronavirus.dc.gov/vaccine>. Additionally, there are COVID-19 vaccination training program materials for healthcare professionals that can be accessed by you and your staff. These training resources include modules that are specific to the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines and can be accessed at https://train.org/main/training_plan/4870.

Lastly, while vaccine supply remains constrained, DC Health will continue to follow the CDC recommendation to administer vaccine through a small network. As the vaccine supply increases and additional vaccines are approved for use in the US, DC Health will be able to increase the provider network allowing for vaccine to be administered in more physician practices in Phase 2 and Phase 3. For now, physicians will play a critical role in counseling and educating their patients on the vaccine and encouraging them to access the vaccine in the available community settings.

For the most up-to-date information regarding the District of Columbia's response to COVID-19, visit <https://coronavirus.dc.gov>.

Thank you for all you do to provide high quality care and services to residents of the District of Columbia.

Sincerely,



LaQuandra S. Nesbitt, MD, MPH
Director