

On Wednesday, October 28th the Joint COVID-19 Legislative Workgroup held a briefing to discuss primarily vaccine development and distribution. Speakers included representatives from the University of Maryland Medical System, BIO/Pharma and the Maryland Department of Health. The presentations can be reviewed [here](#).

About vaccine development, the presentations did overlap. There are five “front-runners,” meaning that they are all in Phase III – Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca/Oxford, Johnson & Johnson and Novavax. There are about another 180 in development in various phases. All presentations stressed the safety measures that have been put in place for evaluations. The FDA requires an efficacy of 50%. The vaccine is really to prevent symptomatic illness, medical complications, hospitalizations and death. It was stressed that if it prevented 90% of hospitalizations then it should be considered a success. In a recent Goucher Poll conducted between September 3rd and October 4th of 1002 adults, 50% expressed that they would not take a federally approved vaccine. Therefore, a strong public education campaign is required to encourage greater participation in receiving a vaccine.

Regarding distribution of the vaccine(s) when approved. The United States population is 330 million. According to UMMS, the populations most at risk nationally are healthcare personnel (20 million); other essential workers (60 million); older adults over 65 years (53 million); high risk medical conditions (100 million); and then special populations of children and pregnant women and communities of color. Likewise, the Maryland Department of Health prioritized similar populations for first-priority for a vaccine – high risk health care workers (322,380); first responders (41,260); adults in congregate or crowded settings (43,160); Judiciary (4320); jails/prisons and detention centers (54,460); and high risk individuals due to health concerns (390,000). Please note that individuals in these groups do overlap. The Maryland Department of Health has convened both a Technical Advisory Committee and a Stakeholder Advisory Committee but is awaiting greater guidance from the federal government. As noted in its draft plan, providers that wish to be able to administer vaccines will need to register with ImmuNet.

Questions asked by Workgroup members included:

1. Senator Rosapepe - How will the vaccine be allocated, and can it be purchased on the open market similar to what occurred with PPE? All speakers stated that they anticipated that all preliminary doses will be purchased and distributed by the federal government to States for distribution according to their plans. Given the number of doses that have already been contracted to with the federal government, it would be very unlikely that any would be available on the open market at the onset.
2. Delegate Luedtke – Where should Maryland be looking at as a State to bolster our bio-tech in the long-term? All speakers indicated that, unfortunately, this will not be the last pandemic, and that Maryland should take steps to bolster. For example, Moderna is a Maryland company that was small and growing and is now one of the lead candidates for the first vaccine.
3. Delegate Pena-Melnyk – How will Maryland ensure that a vaccine is safe? Is Maryland creating a reporting system for adverse reactions? When is the priority given to black and brown communities? Secretary Neall basically stated that Maryland will be reviewing to ensure that the vaccine is safe; it is working with the federal government on reporting systems and that priority for black and brown communities that have been drastically affected by the pandemic is also under consideration.
4. Senator Pinsky – Where does education fall in the priority list? Phase II – however, the health department indicated that this is a fluid priority list and will be aligned with final ACIP guidance.
5. Delegate Sample Hughes – Has the State done an assessment on what areas of the State may not be able to easily accept a vaccine due to storage and other challenges? The health department indicated that an initial assessment has been done and that they are continuing to work to overcome issues.
6. Senator Kelley made a reference to Baltimore City not being able to conduct trash collection and that a broader definition of essential worker may need to be taken into consideration.