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Pitt behind a 'long line' of groups planning to provide COVID-19 vaccine

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By **DONOVAN HARRELL**

Even though the Pennsylvania Department of Health approved the University of Pittsburgh as a COVID-19 vaccine provider, it may be a while before the vaccine is more widely available to the Pitt community.

Melissa McGivney, the associate dean for community partnerships at the School of Pharmacy, said at the Feb. 17 Senate Council meeting that due to high demand and low supply, the University falls behind "a very long line of people who'd like to provide the vaccine."

The University does not have its own vaccine, McGivney said, but Pitt is partnering with UPMC and the Allegheny Health Department for its vaccine distribution efforts, dubbed the "PITTCovax" Initiative. The "Co" refers to both "collaborative" and "COVID."

So far, a majority of Pitt's patient-facing students in the health sciences and about 5,000 healthcare personnel have been vaccinated through the partnerships, McGivney said.

And the Peterson Event Center is also standing by and "is ready to go at a moment's notice," once more vaccines are available for distribution, McGivney added.

Most recently on Jan. 28 and 29, Pitt partnered with the Allegheny County Health Department to distribute the vaccine to over 800 patient-facing students from seven nearby colleges at the center.

Pitt's Community Engagement Centers in Homewood and the Hill District also have distributed vaccines to more than 2,000 people who were 65 or older, McGivney said.

Nearly 200 Pitt community members and volunteers helped with the distribution. The University will be able to conduct 28-day follow-up visits, McGivney added. She thanked CEC leadership for building the partnerships to make this possible.

Pitt also has purchased ultracold freezers to be able to store the Pfizer vaccine, and is continuing to refine the IT infrastructure for registering and booking vaccine appointments.

McGivney and Chancellor Patrick Gallagher reminded the Pitt community to fill out the Pitt Vaccine Survey, which was sent out on Jan. 28.

They said the survey will help the COVID Medical Response Office determine who is eligible for vaccination and how vaccines are distributed once the vaccine becomes more widely available at Pitt.

COVID-19 numbers on campus

Since students began returning to residence halls on Jan. 29, there have been 67 students who have tested positive for COVID-19 on the Oakland campus as of Feb. 22. There have been 11 cases on the Johnstown campus and one at Bradford.

In that same time period, 26 faculty or staff members, who have been on the Oakland campus in the previous 14 days, have tested positive.

Since Jan. 11, more than 2,000 students have participated in surveillance testing on the Oakland campus and only 10 tested positive.

The Greensburg campus, which has had only 13 student cases and six among employees since Aug. 1, was moved to the Guarded status on Feb. 22. The other campuses remain at the Elevated status.

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