

Senator Julian Cyr:

All right, good evening. My name is Julian Cyr and I am the state senator for the Cape and Islands District. This includes 20 towns across Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. And I am your moderator this evening for our telephone town hall. I'm pleased to be joined tonight by several colleagues in state and county governments, along with local health leaders. With us tonight is state representative Sarah Peake, county commissioner Ron Bergstrom, Kevin Cranston from the Department of Public Health, Mike Lauf from Cape Cod Healthcare, Dr. Kevin Mulroy from Cape Cod Healthcare, Sean O'Brien from the Barnstable County Department of Health and Environment, and I also want to recognize Congressman Bill Keating, who is listening in on the line.

Senator Julian Cyr:

Tonight's call has been paid for by Barnstable County. Representative Sarah Peake and I are here representing and with our outstanding Cape and Islands legislative delegation, and those colleagues include Senator Su Moran of Falmouth and representatives Tim Whelan of Brewster, Kip Diggs with Barnstable, Dave Vieira of East Falmouth, Steven Xiarhos of West Barnstable and Dylan Fernandes of Woods Hole. This delegation, thanks to you for your time. It is an honor to serve and represent you. Tonight's work is made possible by the Cape Cod COVID-19 Response Task Force and is funded by Barnstable County government.

Senator Julian Cyr:

This week marks a year since the first case of COVID-19 was identified in Massachusetts. On Monday, we reached a grim milestone of 500,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Massachusetts. On Cape Cod, we've seen over 9,300 cases. We've lost 342 Cape Codders to COVID-19 to date. It has been a very difficult and challenging year.

Senator Julian Cyr:

The COVID-19 vaccines are a medical miracle. Science has indeed prevailed and pretty darn fast. We are especially proud that Moderna is a Massachusetts-based company and Pfizer has a significant presence in Massachusetts. We are fortunate on Cape Cod to have the ability and equipment, specifically ultra cold storage capacity, to administer both Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. And the stakeholders who comprise the Cape Cod COVID-19 Task Force stand ready on Cape Cod with the infrastructure in place and the commitment of senior leaders, healthcare professionals and providers and volunteers to get these vaccines into the arms of our residents as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Senator Julian Cyr:

Make no mistake, we are ready. However, not unlike other regions of the state or communities throughout the nation experiencing similar issues, there is a lack of doses making it over the bridges from federal and state governments and the doses we currently have are insufficient to meet our demand. Let me be clear. This is a temporary obstacle. It will get better as the Commonwealth acquires more vaccine. Tonight, we will share all the information that we have

and discuss how we will manage through vaccine access and availability with a particular emphasis on those over 65, starting with those over 75.

Senator Julian Cyr:

Tonight, we have two goals. First, to provide information from medical providers on the vaccines and their effectiveness and to answer medical questions relevant to people over the age of 65, and second, to provide information from the Department of Public Health, the Barnstable County Department of Health and Environment and the Cape Cod COVID-19 Task Force on where we are in the vaccine rollout and what you can expect on the availability of COVID-19 vaccine appointments going forward here on Cape Cod.

Senator Julian Cyr:

The aim tonight is to provide all the information we have and to answer all the questions that we can. And of course, we want to relieve anxiety, calm frayed nerves, and instill confidence that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and it will be shining upon us soon. Changes are underway at the federal and state levels to increase distribution and tighten managing of the vaccine.

Senator Julian Cyr:

This has been a profoundly challenging 11 months, and I want to be honest that it will remain challenging for some time. The rollout of vaccine availability for people over 75 in the past week has been difficult to say the least, but I'm hopeful that we are going to see improvement as we get more vaccine here on Cape Cod. We are here this evening to provide you with information about plans that are in place to distribute vaccines once we start to receive doses in an adequate quantity.

Senator Julian Cyr:

The Cape Cod COVID-19 Response Task Force cannot control the state software or the sign-up method. We're certainly calling on and working with our partners at the state government to have that improved. But what we can do and we're aiming to do is work to make sure that your experience as a resident of Barnstable County is as seamless as possible, again, once enough doses are delivered here.

Senator Julian Cyr:

Thus far, between Cape Cod Healthcare, our community health centers, Barnstable County, and several towns, there have been 10,700 first doses of COVID-19 vaccine administered and 5,050 second doses administered. Those are primarily to those who are eligible in phase one of the state's vaccine plan. I do want to note, unfortunately, we do not have information from CVS, Walgreens, and Stop and Shop on the number of vaccines that they have administered on Cape Cod. We reached out to all three of those entities prior to this call and they declined to provide us that information.

Senator Julian Cyr:

Lastly, please keep in mind that we are just entering into phase two step one, during which only those who age 75 and above are eligible for vaccinations in addition to those who are included in phase one. And so individuals 65 to 74, you are on deck. You will be eligible soon, but we wanted to extend this call to all adults over 65.

Senator Julian Cyr:

Now I would like to introduce Mike Lauf, the CEO of Cape Cod Healthcare, for a few words. Mike.

Mike Lauf, CCH:

Good evening and thank you, Senator Cyr. I'd also like to thank Representative Peake along with the entire Cape Cod Delegation, county commissioner Ron Bergstrom, Kevin Cranston from the state, as well as Kevin Mulroy, my colleague and Sean O'Brien.

Mike Lauf, CCH:

Cape Cod Healthcare remains committed to diagnosing, to treating, to curing and to helping people to recuperate from COVID-19. We have tested over 30,000 people. We've worked hand in hand with the county, with our elected delegation and with our towns to ensure that each and every person that needed our assistance collectively got it. We've invested in PPE. We've invested in vaccines. We've invested in sites. We've invested large amounts in testing to ensure that we could meet our commitment as a safety net healthcare provider in this community.

Mike Lauf, CCH:

We were so fortunate in phase one to be identified by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as healthcare workers to receive vaccine. Our healthcare workers signed up. They were excited, and for the first time could honestly say they saw a light at the end of the tunnel. Over 75% of our workforce has been fully vaccinated. And there is a remaining 10% that is on deck to receive their second dose. We remain committed to assist the county, our towns, the delegation, and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts with anything they may need from testing to vaccine delivery. We want to make sure that as Cape Codders, we are there for each other. We have now done over 7,000 first doses and 4,300 second doses.

Mike Lauf, CCH:

There has been much to say about the COVID-19 vaccination site at the Melody Tent for the first three days of this week. In concert with Barnstable County, our delegation, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, we felt it was absolutely vital to get as much of our vaccine distributed. We had roughly 2000 remaining doses originally from the federal government that did not get utilized during the phase one round.

Mike Lauf, CCH:

To ensure that these doses were utilized in a timely manner, Cape Cod Healthcare identified and contacted patients who would be authorized in phase two to receive the vaccine. We began with people over the age of 90 that had multiple comorbid conditions. We simply did it to ensure that

people could get the vaccine and we could be a part of the solution for the county, for Cape Cod and for the Commonwealth. We will continue to partner with Barnstable County, the Commonwealth, our delegation to remaining any COVID-19 vaccine that are in our community for those that are eligible.

Mike Lauf, CCH:

As a safety net healthcare provider, it is our goal, along with those that I've already mentioned, to vaccinate everybody. We are in this together. As we get more vaccine, as it becomes available to us, we will do whatever we can to vaccinate people. If we have remaining doses, we will pass them along. I would again like to thank the distinguished people on this call and those of you in the audience for taking the time to listen. We pledge at Cape Cod Healthcare to continue to remain a part of the solution. Thank you, Senator Cyr.

Senator Julian Cyr:

Thank you, Mike. Again, if you have a question for the speakers, just press zero on your phone keypad now.

Just press zero on your phone keypad now to be added to the queue. And we're going to try to answer as many questions as possible at the end of our presentation.

Senator Julian Cyr:

I'd now like to introduce Dr. Kevin Mulroy, who is Senior Vice President and Chief Quality Officer for Cape Cod Healthcare. He is also a physician trained in internal medicine. Dr. Mulroy.

Dr. Kevin Mulroy, CCH:

Thank you, Senator Cyr, and welcome everybody tonight. It's a pleasure to be able to speak to you tonight. I've been asked to speak to you more about the clinical aspects of the vaccine from a physician's perspective. And I think probably the easiest way to do that is to just go over some of the questions that I get asked pretty much on a daily basis. The most common ones are what these vaccines are. There's a lot of confusion surrounding that. How safe and effective the vaccines are. People ask me point blank if they should get the vaccine, and they want to know what contrary indications there are, who shouldn't get the vaccine, and what are we going to do about opening up society and relaxing precautions once we're all fully vaccinated.

Dr. Kevin Mulroy, CCH:

So I'm going to answer those one at a time, but I think the best place to start is by answering what the vaccines are. So we currently have two vaccines, the Moderna vaccine and the Pfizer vaccine. They use a very different type of technology than we've ever seen before. And it's something that you've probably heard of called messenger RNA or mRNA. And it takes a little bit of explaining. Most people know what DNA is, that's the code that tells cells how to make proteins. But mRNA can be thought of as an instruction sheet that goes from DNA to the cell's machinery to make proteins.

Dr. Kevin Mulroy, CCH:

So if you think about it, DNA is the architect and mRNA is the blueprint. So these vaccines have essentially just the blueprint for proteins in them. mRNA is very fragile, very quickly destroyed after it's used, so it doesn't hang around very long. Now it's not dissimilar from how viruses work as a whole. They tend to inject huge amounts of their own mRNA into their cells so that the cell machinery can make new viruses, and then the viruses then explode the cell and they release to create a cycle.

Dr. Kevin Mulroy, CCH:

The vaccine doesn't work that way. It uses only a tiny part of the mRNA to make part of the spike protein, which is the part of the virus that attaches to human beings and allows replication. Then this protein is recognized by the body as foreign, and it creates this immune response. So it is a really very interesting and unique technology that's fairly new to us.

Dr. Kevin Mulroy, CCH:

But it has some really massive advantages. For one, there's no virus in this. There's no live virus. There's no attenuated virus or deactivated virus. It's just this mRNA. It can be very quickly operationalized if there's changes to the virus, so you can really ramp up production fairly quickly. There's no need to grow anything, and it is very safe.

Dr. Kevin Mulroy, CCH:

There really is not much in the vaccine. There is this mRNA, which is fragile, so you need to surround it with something called the lipid or a fat layer that protects the mRNA. And then there's a number of salts in the vaccine, and there's also something called polyethylene glycol or glycol, which is a common food additive. So all in all, it is a very safe vaccine. When Pfizer and Moderna went through the FDA, through the phases of trial, they did not go through a shortened testing cycle as you may have heard. They had 43,000 people who were tested by Pfizer and greater than 30,000 from Moderna. And again, the vaccine was found to be as safe as any that are essentially out there.

Dr. Kevin Mulroy, CCH:

Is the vaccine effective? Well, the Pfizer vaccine was found to be 95% effective at preventing symptomatic disease one week after the second dose, which is a pretty high percentage. Moderna was at 94.1% effective for the same time period. And both of them were 100% effective at preventing severe disease.

Dr. Kevin Mulroy, CCH:

So that leads to the ultimate question. Should you get vaccinated? As a physician, I've got to tell you, overwhelmingly I would recommend everyone who is eligible for this vaccine get vaccinated. One thing that we really want to do to move into the next phase and get back to some type of normalcy, is to develop herd immunity. And we can't develop herd immunity until we get at least 70% of Cape Codders vaccinated, meaning that we'll have to continue to mask and social distance until that point is reached.

Dr. Kevin Mulroy, CCH:

So who can get this vaccine? Well, as of right now, there are very few contraindications. There are some people who can't get the vaccine due to allergy reasons, but really there are only two exceptions. People who have a severe allergic reaction, that means anaphylaxis or shortness of breath and swelling of the throat to any component of the COVID-19 vaccine, should not receive the vaccine. That includes things like the glycol that's within the vaccine. So if you've had a reaction to any of those, you shouldn't get the vaccine.

Dr. Kevin Mulroy, CCH:

Also people with severe allergic reaction, again, anaphylaxis to any vaccine or injectable medication should speak with their healthcare provider prior to receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. It doesn't mean you can't get it, but you should really speak to your doctor about what your own reaction was prior to getting it. Everyone else, and that includes severe allergic reactions to foods, oral medications, latex, pets, insects, environmental triggers, all of those, those people are recommended to get vaccinated at this point.

Dr. Kevin Mulroy, CCH:

There are some things you need to know, though. We will be observing people for 15 minutes after vaccination, and those with severe allergies should be observed for at least 30 minutes. So we need to plan for that before getting vaccinated. Again, always, we encourage everybody to speak to their physicians about their particulars of your own situation if you have any concerns about getting vaccinated.

Dr. Kevin Mulroy, CCH:

So there are also lots of questions about pregnancy. And right now we don't have a lot of details, but the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology recommends not withholding the vaccination from pregnant women. So pregnant women should be getting the vaccine. Immunosuppressed, people with cancer, people who are on chemotherapy, again, not a lot of data, but these people are not excluded and it's recommended they also receive the vaccine. There is some potential for a decreased immune response, so we need to maintain careful precautions for any of patients who do, even after they get vaccinated.

Dr. Kevin Mulroy, CCH:

Children is the one area that we don't have a lot of data yet. The Pfizer vaccine is recommended for people over the age of 16 and Moderna 18 and over, but in a short time, there should be information coming out about children as well.

Dr. Kevin Mulroy, CCH:

Also, we get questions about if I previously had COVID. The antibodies from COVID are protective for a period of time, but the short answer would be, if you had COVID disease, yes, you should still get the vaccine. If you recently had COVID, however, you want to wait until four weeks after your symptom onset or from your positive test for dose one. When you go to get dose two, you wait until you're out of isolation.

Dr. Kevin Mulroy, CCH:

So I guess the last thing that's on most people's minds is when can I stop wearing the masks? When can we stop social distancing? At this point, the data shows that the vaccine are very good at preventing symptomatic disease, but they do not show that you can't carry the virus and be asymptomatic. So that means, unfortunately, despite the fact that we have the vaccine, it does not mean that we can't still pass on the virus to other people who haven't been vaccinated. So what we really need to do is continue masking and social distancing and hand-washing until herd immunity is achieved. Hopefully that'll occur sometime this summer and the fall, depending on how many people actually get the vaccine. In the meantime, we need to be very careful about precautions, avoid large gatherings, maintain social distancing, all those things that we've really learned to do through this.

Dr. Kevin Mulroy, CCH:

Thank you very much, Senator Cyr, for the time.

Senator Julian Cyr:

Thank you, Dr. Mulroy. I'd now like to introduce Kevin Cranston, Assistant Commissioner and Director of the Bureau of Infectious Disease and Laboratory Sciences from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Kevin is with us tonight on behalf of the Baker-Polito Administration. Thank you for being here, Kevin.

Kevin Cranston, DPH:

Thank you so much, Senator Cyr. And thank you everybody for your time and attention today to this important issue. I bring greetings from Governor Baker, Secretary Sudders, who also leads our COVID Command Center, and Commissioner Bharel, all send their greetings and would love to be with you tonight.

Kevin Cranston, DPH:

I am very pleased to be able to update you on the status of the pandemic in Massachusetts, talk about vaccine access, which I know is of keen interest to all of you, and to share some of the good news that's both in front of us and before us in the coming weeks. As you know, we have just gone through our second major peak of the pandemic, having experienced the major initial peak back almost a year ago. I do remember that Friday evening when the first case of COVID-19 was announced in Massachusetts. It was the first of many weekends that state officials, local officials, and all of you have had to deal with this pandemic and what we all went through in March and April of last year. And I can only imagine the personal losses that many of you on this call have experienced, as I have, as others on this call have that.

Kevin Cranston, DPH:

And now we have just come through another very serious peak following the holidays and what we anticipated to be a greater transmission of the virus during the winter time, because people are indoors and much more likely to be in close contact. While I can't declare anything over, it is increasingly clear to us from the data that we are on the decline of this particular wave of the

pandemic. I can't say there won't be others, but this is coinciding with the rollout of highly effective vaccines. And I appreciate Dr. Mulroy's very careful and thoughtful description of the current vaccine availability.

Kevin Cranston, DPH:

When the first doses of vaccine came to Massachusetts, it really was a red-letter day for us in public health. I've been working in public health for over 30 years. This is actually my third pandemic, having started as a young man in the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which I know also deeply impacted many people and communities on Cape Cod. I also was involved particularly in the H1N1 pandemic, which, in retrospect, pales by comparison to this one. We have never in our lives, and frankly, in recent history, seeing anything like the COVID-19 pandemic at the local, national or global levels.

Kevin Cranston, DPH:

As you know, the Baker Administration asked Dr. Paul Biddinger from Mass General Brigham to convene a COVID-19 advisory group. And it was that advisory group that made the original recommendations for prioritizing populations for the rollout of the vaccine. There was simply not enough vaccine for everyone to get access at the same time. The advisory group prioritized the reduction of severe illness and deaths from COVID, the preservation of the healthcare infrastructure, the healthcare access that people need to stay well, as well as promoting health equity throughout the state in the rollout of this vaccine. I'm delighted to report that we are substantially through the vaccination in phase one, including healthcare providers, first responders, home health aides, people who live in congregate settings and long-term care facilities.

Kevin Cranston, DPH:

And that's what enabled Governor Baker to decide to open up the beginning of phase two. So we're in phase two, group one, which has created access in the past week for people 75 and up. And while I can't give a precise date, it will be soon before phase two, group two opens up, including people who are 65 and up, people living with two or more comorbidities or health conditions known to make it more likely to have a serious illness from COVID, as well as individuals living in affordable and low income senior housing.

Kevin Cranston, DPH:

I want to say though, despite the progress we've made, I know it's been hard. I know particularly this past week has been hard. As patients become more eligible for the vaccine, the ability of folks to be able to connect themselves with vaccine, to get through on telephones, on websites, to be able to make appointments. On the one hand, I'm delighted, there's such demand. I'm delighted that there are so many people who want to get these effective vaccines. But it really breaks my heart when people have to spend long hours trying to get through, trying to get to an appointment.

Kevin Cranston, DPH:

There is good news on the Cape, of course. In particular Barnstable County, working with healthcare providers, local officials, and many of you on this call have done a remarkable job. It really set the standard for the rest of the state in terms of local coordination, with public vaccination sites currently available in Orleans, Hyannis, and Falmouth, and more to come. With our great healthcare partners in Cape Cod Healthcare and incredible coordination across local health departments and healthcare providers, you really have the best infrastructure in the state for moving forward and being able to create the access that I'm so glad all of you are looking forward to.

Kevin Cranston, DPH:

You may have heard that Governor Baker will imminently be announcing some telephone support for individuals who may have more difficulty than others navigating websites or smartphone apps. You should expect announcements of that telephone support that will help guide people with a live person through getting through to a scheduling of a vaccine.

Kevin Cranston, DPH:

I want to say, I urge you, as Dr. Mulroy has also urged you, to consider getting this vaccine. It is a personal decision, and I know many of you have already made it, but for any of you out there who are still reticent or have a little lack of confidence about the vaccine, I want to say, and I'm way down on the list in terms of my eligibility, but the day I become eligible, is the day I try to schedule my shot. And I urge you to do the same. This is the way out of this pandemic.

Kevin Cranston, DPH:

But I'm also going to urge patients during this process. This has never been done before in the history of humanity, to move two doses of vaccine to what we are aiming for 80% of the population to be vaccinated by summertime. I am delighted to have an effective vaccine. I'm glad to have the two that we have in hand, and I'm very much looking forward to new formulations. We expect the Johnson & Johnson vaccine to be submitted for FDA approval as early as this week, which means if it's approved, it could be available as a one-dose vaccine as early as March, and in much larger numbers. It may double the amount of vaccine coming into Massachusetts.

Kevin Cranston, DPH:

We've seen much improved communication, coordination, and leadership in the new federal administration, and it's just my job to say to you, the vaccine is what's going to make you safe in the long run. The vaccine is going to make us all safer in the long run, and with some patience and coordination and trust, we'll all get through this together.

Kevin Cranston, DPH:

Senator Cyr, thank you very much for inviting me.

Senator Julian Cyr:

Thank you, Kevin. Appreciate your time. Before we hear from our next speaker, we have a question. If you are unable to get to the vaccination site itself and need a ride to your appointment, please press one on your phone now. Again, press one if you have no transportation options, you are home-bound, you do not drive, or you do not have a friend or family member who can drive you to a vaccine appointment once you have the vaccine appointment scheduled. We want to contact you if you need a ride to your vaccine appointment, once you are able to make a vaccine appointment.

Senator Julian Cyr:

And also, if you have a question for our speakers, just press zero on your phone keypad now to be added to the queue. We're going to try to answer as many questions as possible at the end.

Senator Julian Cyr:

I'm now going to introduce Ron Bergstrom, who is from Chatham, and is the Chair of the Barnstable County Board of Regional Commissioners. Cape Cod is fortunate to have a robust county government that is unique in the Commonwealth, and our county government has repeatedly stepped up during this pandemic to help Cape Codders through this crisis. Barnstable County made tonight's call possible. I would like to turn it over to Ron.

County Commissioner Ron Bergstrom:

Okay. Thank you, Senator. I want folks listening in tonight to know that since early last spring, Barnstable County has been reaching out to help all of our citizens get through this pandemic healthy, and we'll move on.

In partnership with Cape Cod Healthcare we've established and are operating COVID-19 testing sites throughout the Cape, many of which will be now switched over to locations to administer the COVID-19 vaccine on Cape Cod.

County Commissioner Ron Bergstrom:

Meanwhile, we've had an economic crisis. A lot of people are out of work during the closures, and we've reached out to provide access to food, not only to those who are quarantined, but also to those that find themselves in need because they've lost employment or for other factors. If you need help, reach out to us. Our website is [wwwBarnstablecounty.org](http://www.Barnstablecounty.org). That's wwwBarnstablecounty.org.

County Commissioner Ron Bergstrom:

Our COVID-19 vaccine hotline is (774) 330-3001. That's (774) 330-3001. I'd also like to reach out, give a shout out to all the County staff and volunteers from the Cape Cod Medical Reserve Corps, who have been working hard every day since early last spring to assist the residential Barnstable County to get through this crisis. So thanks to them.

County Commissioner Ron Bergstrom:

And now I'll turn it over to the moderator, Senator Cyr.

Senator Julian Cyr:

Thank you, Ron. I'd like to introduce Sean O'Brien, who is the Director of the Barnstable County Department of Health and Environment. Sean is leading the establishment of several COVID-19 vaccine clinics that we are opening on Cape Cod. Sean, and doing tremendous work. I'm turning it over to you, Sean.

Sean O'Brien:

Great. Thank you, Senator. And thank you to all of our speakers and especially thank you to all of you who have called in this evening. I'm really happy to be able to share what we're doing and all that's going on with COVID here in Barnstable County.

Sean O'Brien:

I'll start off by saying, I know this has really been a difficult and frustrating week for many of you. To many of you or your family members who use the internet, I know you've spent hours trying to book appointments over the last week. It is our hope over the next several weeks, we can get more vaccine here on the Cape so we can open up more appointments and get more of you vaccinated.

Sean O'Brien:

As a reminder, everyone in Phase 1 of the Massachusetts COVID 19 vaccine plan is eligible to get vaccinated. That includes all healthcare workers, residents and staff in nursing homes, assisted living facilities and other congregate care settings and group homes. All police officers, firefighters, EMTs, and correction officers have also been offered a vaccine.

Sean O'Brien:

This past Monday, February 1st, any Massachusetts resident over 75 years old has become eligible to receive the vaccine. Right now in Massachusetts, we're getting approximately 85,000 to 100,000 doses of vaccine a week from the federal government, and that's for the entire state.

Sean O'Brien:

And please remember, there are approximately 1 million people over the age of 75 in Massachusetts, all who need two doses of either the Pfizer or the Moderna vaccine. So we essentially need 2 million doses for all people over age 75 in Massachusetts.

Sean O'Brien:

Another thing to remember is we are the oldest county in New England. And we are the third oldest county by population in the country. So we have a lot of work to do here in Barnstable County. We're receiving approximately 975 doses of vaccine per week. Several Walgreens, CVS, and Stop & Shop locations on the Cape are also getting vaccine from the State.

Sean O'Brien:

Vaccine received by Barnstable County will be going to set up vaccination clinics across Cape Cod in partnership with our 15 local boards of health for those 15 towns on the Cape. Some community health centers may also start receiving vaccine from the State in the coming weeks.

Sean O'Brien:

They will be an important part of the solution for delivering vaccine. We have started holding vaccine clinics at the Cape Cod Fairgrounds in Falmouth and the Cape Cod Melody Tent. We will also soon start holding more vaccination clinics in Orleans, Eastham, and Provincetown, among other towns.

Sean O'Brien:

We just need more vaccine from the State, which is what we have asked for. I'm sure many of you are wondering how you can book an appointment at one of our sites and find where the new sites are on Cape Cod as soon as they become available. You will be able to do that at mass.gov/COVIDvaccine through the state's vaccine map. You could also do that from our website, BarnstableCountyhealth.org.

Sean O'Brien:

In addition, if you visit BarnstableCountyhealth.org, you can sign up for our vaccine email list and we will send everyone on that email list an email when we are putting new vaccine appointments online to be scheduled. So that way you'll be notified of new available appointments in the coming weeks before they're put online.

Sean O'Brien:

These clinics will be limited in number of because we're still receiving a limited number of vaccines. And I want to repeat that. We're only receiving 975 doses for the region. So the clinics are going to be limited until we see an increase in those doses. Signing up for the email notification doesn't necessarily guarantee you an appointment. It is designed to be an email notification to alert you to a vaccine clinic opening.

Sean O'Brien:

Now I'll be very blunt. We have seen some issues with the software in order to sign up. Probably one of the first ones we realized, it has been difficult for our sites to be located on the map on the State site, the mass.gov site. We have been working with the state to get that corrected.

Sean O'Brien:

Additionally, whenever people cancel an appointment at a clinic, it actually shows that there are seats available. That's not the case. What happens is when we fill up a clinic, there are also, after those appointments are filled up, there is also a wait list that is generated by the software, not by us.

Sean O'Brien:

And those people on the wait list are actually filled in to any of those open slots. That wait list that the software uses is only for that clinic. So we've had a lot of calls about that the last few days, and hopefully that will clarify it a little bit. So if you do see that there may be some seats open, we're going to be going through and using that wait list within the software for the people who were put on that wait list.

Sean O'Brien:

I want to also make it clear to all that vaccine appointments must be scheduled. Every one of our regional sites will be scheduled. We do not have any drive-up appointments available anywhere for folks that don't have an appointment. We have to be very strict on this. You must schedule an appointment.

Sean O'Brien:

Many people also want to know what they should expect when they arrive for their vaccination. You'll be told when you book your appointment when and where to show up. The vaccine will be an intramuscular shot into your upper arm, so wear clothing that will be easy for you to roll up your arm sleeve or wear a t-shirt underneath your layers.

Sean O'Brien:

On hand performing your vaccination and staffing the site will be trained, registered nurses and other medical professionals. Once you are vaccinated, there is a federally required 15 minute observation period where you will be monitored by those medical professionals before you can head home. And those medical professionals are trained to give you care if you do experience a side effect or an allergic reaction.

Sean O'Brien:

I can promise you all that we will handle all vaccine we receive with the highest possible care. With the vaccine we've received so far, we have not lost a dose. Let me repeat that. We have not lost a dose. We will not waste any vaccine and all the medical providers I'm aware of on the Cape have abided by the same high standards. We're fortunate here on the Cape. We have plenty of ultra cold freezer capacity.

Sean O'Brien:

That's actually giving us the ability to get Pfizer vaccine as well. So we can handle both of them, both Pfizer and Moderna. We're working hard every day to prepare to get the vaccine out to people as quickly and safely as possible. And we're working very hard to make sure everyone has a fair and equal access to these appointments.

Sean O'Brien:

So I want to thank everybody. I want to just reaffirm patience for the time being and thank you for calling in this evening. Senator back to you.

Senator Julian Cyr:

Thank you, Sean. Before we hear from our next speaker, we do have a question. If you do not have access to the internet or a computer at home, we want to know. So in order to make most of the vaccine appointments, you need a computer or internet access at home. If you do not have access to either, please press one on your phone right now. Again, press one if you do not have internet or a computer at home. We want to contact you if you do not have access to the internet or computer at home.

Senator Julian Cyr:

And again, if you have a question, just press zero on your keypad to get in line to ask questions at the end. I now would like to introduce State Representative Sarah Peake, who has just been a remarkable leader, not only for the Fourth Barnstable district, but for the entire region and who is the Dean of our legislative delegation.

Senator Julian Cyr:

Representative Peake, thank you for being with us tonight. Representative Peake, I'm turning it over to you.

Rep. Sarah Peake:

Yeah. Thank you, Senator Cyr. I had to unmute myself there. I'm here. I'm with you now. Senator, thank you. Thank you. So yes. Thank you. Thanks so much for organizing this call. I also want to thank Barnstable County for footing what is a fairly hefty bill for this technology that allows us to talk to thousands of you this evening. And to the thousands who are on the call, I want to thank you for taking time to hear this briefing and hopefully it's answering some of the questions that you have had and gives you some assurance that we're all trying to pull from the same oar here, and do our best and get these vaccines into people's arms as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

Rep. Sarah Peake:

And then I know that many of you who are between the ages of 65 and 74, but not yet 75 are also eager to get this vaccination, get vaccinated as soon as possible. But under the State's vaccine plan, for those of you between 65 and 74, you will be up next. As the Senator put it, you are on deck. But obviously, it's going to take some time to vaccinate those who are 75 years old and above for them to get their vaccine over the next month or so.

Rep. Sarah Peake:

And while I wish that the scheduling and logistics of vaccine distribution were left up to me, because believe me, I'd make some changes, but that's not the case. We can only move as fast as the State's allocation of vaccine doses allows us to move. So I'm asking all of you to please be patient as we go through this process.

Rep. Sarah Peake:

I also want to address something that has become a clear fault in the State's vaccine plan. But we heard earlier this evening from our great partner in government, that this is being addressed. But

the fact that there is currently as of tonight, no State 1-800 phone number or hotline for people who were 75 years or older to use to book appointments to get a vaccine.

Rep. Sarah Peake:

Having an internet only booking platform is clearly not working. And it's especially not working for seniors who may not have, or may not regularly use, a computer. So while this was a miss on the part of the administration, the Governor has committed to unveiling a phone booking option later this week, and we are waiting for that information to be released.

Rep. Sarah Peake:

And I know I am certainly looking forward to this, as many of you are as well. Just as a reminder, we focused a lot on vaccinations tonight, but this pandemic is still raging. So the COVID-19 testing sites remain open through the great work of Cape Cod Healthcare, Outer Cape Health Services and the Community Health Center of Cape Cod.

Rep. Sarah Peake:

These are no questions asked, no fee testing sites. So if you question whether you have been exposed, whether you're exhibiting symptoms, please go get a test. It is through testing that we are able to control the spread of this virus. In addition, as you've heard already tonight, we are committed to helping those who need a ride to their vaccine appointment.

Rep. Sarah Peake:

So with the help of Tom Cahir, who is the Director of the Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority, we're working to make sure that anybody who needs a ride to their appointment or needs a vaccine delivered to them, you will get that assistance.

Rep. Sarah Peake:

Those here on Cape Cod, whose permanent residence, and maybe even your driver's license is from another state, but you're here on the Cape, maybe you're a second homeowner, maybe you're a stranded snowbird, you will still be eligible and able to receive a vaccine once your age grouping, your category is eligible under the State's phased vaccine plan that the Mass Department of Public Health has laid out and that is available to see on the mass.gov website.

Rep. Sarah Peake:

And I'm sure many of you also want to know where you can find information on vaccine development. BarnstableCountyhealth.org is a great place and it is frequently updated with new information. And again, for those who maybe don't live on their computer the way some of us do, I would say read the Cape Cod Times, listen to WCAI and buy and read your local newspaper because they also are covering these developments and are a great source of information.

Rep. Sarah Peake:

So with that, I want to thank everybody again for joining us tonight and Senator Cyr, I want to thank you. And I'm going to turn it back over to you. Thanks so much.

Senator Julian Cyr:

Thank you, Sarah, for those reassuring words. And I'm now going to turn it over to Congressman Keating. Congressman Bill Keating, who is with us tonight from Washington. They're voting in DC, but we're glad to have the Congressman here. And we're grateful for his ongoing support and commitment to Cape Cod. We'll hear from the Congressman and then we'll get right into your questions. Congressman Keating?

Congressman Bill Keating:

Julian, thank you so much, Sarah, everyone that's been on board before. Sean, Mike Lauf, the whole gang that's proceeded me, thank you for everything you're doing.

Congressman Bill Keating:

We all know what we've been suffering through. The pandemic has brought a great hunger. 24 million adults right now are having trouble feeding their families. People are out of work. 1 million applied for unemployment last week alone. In one week. Which shows the pandemic is still raging. In January, we saw the most deaths from COVID in one month since the beginning of the pandemic and people continue to be out of work. Children continue to be out of school, which will affect their lifetime earnings and development.

Congressman Bill Keating:

And the social consequences we live with as a country, but also in the Cape as well, with upticks in suicide and domestic abuse and addiction. These are all things that we have to overcome this virus to be successful with. And what we just voted on, within the last hour here in the House, was a vote that will allow fast track if necessary, a fast track procedure to deal with this so that we can't delay any further.

Congressman Bill Keating:

There's a great sense of urgency with what I just described to you. And this first step will provide an alternative should Congress become slow in acting as they have, and have for years I imagine.

Congressman Bill Keating:

But it's an urgent situation. It's an emergency, and we're treating it as such. We've been able to whether some of these storms, although the effects are still there as I said. Our economy, the GDP is the slowest growth since 1946. We're working on many fronts, but center to all those things is the virus. If we can't deal with that, then we won't be successful in any of the other things we're doing. So I want to thank all of you for what you're doing in terms of dealing with the response locally. I want to also tell you that without a greater federal effort, the efforts, the great efforts we're seeing locally and regionally in the Cape and islands just won't be as successful as they should be.

Congressman Bill Keating:

What we're dealing with is something that the magnitude of which has to be hit on many fronts. I'll get into in our office and in other Zooms that we have in our office some of the economic impacts and some of the social impacts, but I want to deal with the vaccine since that's the topic of tonight's discussion in particular. We're moving forward. In December, we gave \$69 billion in assistance to provide with the vaccine.

Congressman Bill Keating:

That's woefully small in terms of what's necessary. The current American Relief Act relief plan that the President's advocating calls for 160 billion directed towards dissemination of the vaccine and dealing with its effects. It'll include monies to state and local governments. That's necessary. If we're going to speed up the amount of time between the manufacturer of these vaccines and when it can get in someone's arm, we're going to need state and local government to help us, but we can't have them go it alone. They just don't have the resources that they would have without federal support.

Congressman Bill Keating:

So this is one of the centerpieces of what we're doing. And without that, even the improvements that are showing up to 1.3 and 1.4 million vaccines distributed daily now won't be enough. So our plan is going to be comprehensive. It's going to give monies for that. We're already investing money and acquisition of more products. We're even acquiring home testing. That's something that will be very helpful down the road.

Congressman Bill Keating:

We also have to continue to do our research. The variants that we've read about are real. Just read that Florida perhaps has more of the UK variant as a majority of their cases than the other COVID-19 cases. We're also concerned about what's happening in South Africa and Brazil and the variants and this virus that are occurring there. I think they'll require research, which is already ongoing, that's the good news, and perhaps booster shots as we go forward and work with this terrible virus and mutations of this virus as we go forward.

Congressman Bill Keating:

We're moving in a direction of urgency, which wasn't there before frankly. We're moving towards relief and recovery, not just trying to keep our head above water and deal with emergency responses. Those responses were important and they were expensive, but they weren't enough to deal with this virus and its effects. So we're fast tracking a response. And I think we'll get ... the early indications are we're getting some great support from the American public, the Treasury Secretary, the chief economists at Moody's, the chairman of the Federal Reserve, even former President Trump's former economic advisor, they're all on board of saying, "This is the scope of the response that we do need."

Congressman Bill Keating:

So I wanted to give people that bit of information and hope. Look, I'm so grateful to the sacrifice of everyone and I think that sacrifice of wearing masks and socially distancing, it really shows in the rates in the Cape and the islands. And help is on the way in this regard. Stay in touch with our office and I'll stay in touch as I have with my partners in state and county government, and my partners in the private side and our medical partners. This is a national crisis, but it's being met with now, as we speak, with the type of urgent response that's necessary.

Congressman Bill Keating:

So I'll be on for the rest of the call. Thank you, Julian, for everything you're doing to organize this and get the message out.

Senator Julian Cyr:

Thank you, Congressman. Really appreciate you making some time to join us tonight. So now we're going to get to some of your questions. I know the hour is late. We're going to ask that folks, try to ask the questions succinctly, and we'll try to answer succinctly. And the first question is going to go to Dean Turner in Mashepee. And Dean has a question and Dr. Kevin Mulroy, I think will be the best person to answer it. Dean?

Dean Turner:

Yes. I have recently completed the pre vaccination questionnaire, and on it there were two questions that I had to answer affirmatively to. Yes, I'm taking a blood thinner and yes, I'm just starting radiation for prostate cancer. The question I have is, since that's two conditions I have, should I be taking the vaccine? And does which one I take make any difference?

Dr. Kevin Mulroy, CCH:

Dean, that's a great question. Essentially those are not contraindications to the vaccine. However, one of the things that we like to know is whether or not it may limit your immune response after you get the vaccine, meaning that you need to continue your precautions. I would speak with your doctor directly about it. He may know more about your medical conditions than just I would know from those two things, but those things in themselves are not contraindications to getting the vaccine.

Senator Julian Cyr:

Thank you Dr. Mulroy. We're now going to go to Bastian in Truro. And Bastian in Truro has a question, and Sean O'Brien, I think you're going to be the best one to answer this question. Bas?

Basch:

Yeah. Nobody has mentioned out of Cape and Provincetown out of Cape and Wellfleet. Are they going to be part of the system of giving vaccinations?

Sean O'Brien:

It is my understanding that the community health centers will be receiving some vaccines. How much, what number, what a month at this point I'm unclear of, but it sounds like that's going to

be the case. I also want to take a moment to also to just correct one thing that I have mentioned. When we were and actually Bas, it's going to be in your town. The outer Cape clinic is actually technically not in Provincetown, is in Truro. So if anybody has any questions about the original sites, please call our office here at the county health department.

Senator Julian Cyr:

Thank you, Sean. We're now going to go to Paula, Paula Litter in Falmouth, who has a question. And I think Sean, I think you're also going to be the best person to answer this question. Paula?

Paula Litter:

Hi. I'm 73 so at the bottom of phase two. You've already answered my question that as a second home owner currently living on the Cape, I can get my vaccine here. If I sign up for email on barnstablecountyhealth.com, will I automatically be notified when it's my turn? And if not, what's the best alternative for me to get an appointment? And also, I'm just curious how many people are on this phone call?

Sean O'Brien:

Well, the last question I won't be able to answer, but the first few I can. So the Barnstable County notification system, the email system will not tell you when your appointment is. It will just let you know when clinics are going to be available to schedule. When you do go online and sign up using the state website, you will receive an email confirming where and when, and that you have an appointment at one of those sites. And I'll leave the number of people on the call to Senator Cyr.

Senator Julian Cyr:

So we've had over 13,000 people on our call with us this evening, and there's actually still over 9,000 people who are with us on this call. I'm told by the folks who are managing that, that this is a trusted member. We're now going to go to Jean Stone in Falmouth. Jean has a question and actually, I think Sean, you're going to be the best person to answer this one too.

Jean Stone:

Okay. Hi. I wondered if there are any accommodations that are going to be made at the vaccination sites for people with disabilities who have trouble sitting or standing for any short period of time?

Sean O'Brien:

Well, for most of our sites, we're going to be drive-through sites. So it will be, these folks will be in cars and we will make it work with administering the shot through the car window, if that helps. If there are any sites that we work on that are indoor sites, we'll make sure that they do ... that they are in compliance with the Disabilities Act, the American Disabilities Act so people are able to be there. But that's one of the reasons why we've looked at drive-throughs, is to be able to kind of allow people to sit and just kind of go through and we bring the vaccine to them.

Senator Julian Cyr:

Thanks Sean. We're now going to go to Sue in Marstons Mills who [inaudible 01:04:01] and Kevin Cranston, I think you're going to be the best person to answer Sue's question. Sue?

Sue:

Hi. How are you? My question is will primary care doctors have a supply of vaccine in their offices so that they can administer to their own patients?

Kevin Cranston, DPH:

Thank you for the question Sue. The answer is yes, and we are right in the midst this week of working through a number of hospitals, which have already offered services to primary care physicians and practices through a depo model, basically ordering vaccine on their behalf and making smaller volumes of doses available initially so they could vaccinate their own staff in phase one.

Kevin Cranston, DPH:

Now that we're moving into phase two, we're looking to adapt that model and work with other healthcare systems to get the vaccine supplies to primary care physicians and other physician practices to begin vaccinating their own patient panels. You should anticipate very precise announcements about that in the next couple of days.

Senator Julian Cyr:

We're now going to go to Bob in Forestdale. Bob has a question, and I think Kevin Cranston, Kevin and also Sean O'Brien would be the best person to answer this question. Bob?

Bob:

[inaudible 01:05:28] second shot like that's the first [inaudible 01:05:35] My second question is for comorbidities. How do I [inaudible 01:05:46]

Senator Julian Cyr:

Thanks Bob. Your question broke up a little bit, but Bob has two questions. One, do you have to go to the same place for your second shot as the first shot? And also he has a comorbidity. How does he prove that?

Kevin Cranston, DPH:

I'm happy to address both of them ...

Senator Julian Cyr:

Kevin, go ahead. Yep.

Kevin Cranston, DPH:

All right. Sure. While it is best practice for whoever, whatever site signs you up for the first shot to help you set up an appointment for the second shot, there's no obligation to go to the same place for your second shot. What is important is that you receive the second shot on time and receive the same formulation that you got the first time. So if you've got Pfizer the first time, 21 days you're due for another Pfizer. If you got Moderna the first time, 28 days later you're due for Moderna. But it doesn't have to be administered by the same location.

Kevin Cranston, DPH:

And regarding co-morbidities, no, you don't need to provide medical evidence of your health conditions. You will be asked to when you sign up either on an app online, or when you present in person to sign a self-attestation that confirms that you are eligible under the current prioritization structure.

Senator Julian Cyr:

Thanks, Kevin. Our next question is from Caroline Davenport in Brewster.

Caroline Davenport:

Hello there. You're doing a wonderful job to start with I have to tell you. My question is I am concerned about seniors who are elderly, and I do know some who are not computer savvy. You did go into this a bit, but I'm wondering if there's not a way to contact those seniors through maybe the councils on aging so that everybody gets a shot and gets a ride.

Senator Julian Cyr:

Thank you so much for that question. I can answer it. So we actually, that's what we're doing right now. So even on this call, that poll question we asked, we had over 600 people on this call identify that they do not have access to internet and are going to need assistance with appointments. We now have all those phone numbers to follow up with those people, which is going to be a task. We're going to aim to do it. There was a hundred people on here about in a prior poll who said they needed a ride, a ride to their vaccine appointment when they have it.

Senator Julian Cyr:

So what we're aiming to do is reach those most vulnerable people. I think the people that I know in my ... in the Cape and islands district, all the doors that I knocked when I ran for this office, people who are older, who may be isolated, who may not have family nearby. And so we're aiming to reach them through this call. We're aiming to reach them through our councils on aging and police departments and other municipal departments that interact and help these folks. And that's where I'm most concerned about, is the people who don't have internet access, who may not have a car. So that's what we're working to do now.

Senator Julian Cyr:

I really want to be respectful of folks' time. We've been on this call for now an hour and 10 minutes. We're not going to be able to answer all the questions that folks have, but I am glad we were able to get some in. I do want to note that today's call has been recorded and will be made

available for those who were unable to make the call. If you do have a question that we weren't able to get to, please stay on the line after the event, and you will be able to record a message for us. And we will try our best to get back to you.

Senator Julian Cyr:

I really want to thank all of you for joining us tonight. I really want to thank our participants today, who provided information. We are committed to providing as much information as possible that we have. We are ready to administer a vaccine that is occurring. We're going to need to be patient as the vaccine ... as we deal with vaccine supply. I want to acknowledge what a difficult time this has been. But we here on Cape Cod are doing everything we can to be pulling together to come through this pandemic, to get vaccination available, to save lives and save livelihoods. So I really want to thank everyone for their time. Please, take good care. And again, if you have a question that you weren't able to ask, stay on the line. You'll be able to record a message and we'll try our best to get back to you. Thank you so much.