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COVID-19 Vaccines for Senior Citizens

Recently, New York State opened COVID-19 vaccine eligibility to individuals age 65 or older. Allegany County Office of the Aging (OFA) recognized that the population we already serve and have a relationship with would likely have questions regarding the vaccine and would need assistance finding and registering for available clinics. To respond to this need, and consistent with our mission of coordinating and referring services for this population, we opened our phone lines specifically to help answer vaccine questions and direct services to our older adults. As a result, we have created a list of older adults interested in receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. When vaccines become available, OFA uses this list to help register individuals for clinics. This service is helpful to our residents who lack internet access or who would otherwise have a difficult time navigating New York State vaccine guidance to find clinics and/or register themselves.

As of this week, the Alfred Pharmacy is the only location currently allocated with vaccines specifically for those aged 65 and older. OFA and the Alfred Pharmacy have partnered together to ensure that vaccines reach those who have contacted either location to express an interest in being vaccinated. The Fillmore Pharmacy is now approved to administer vaccines and has also partnered with OFA regarding their future clinics.

We know that additional pharmacies across the County will become vaccination sites in the near future, and we will offer to create similar partnerships with each location as vaccine becomes available to them. As the State has not provided a mechanism for a waiting list for clinics to use for older adults, we hope that these local efforts will help fill that void with a centralized hub of information. As the current list of approved local pharmacies are all small “mom and pop” stores, a coordination of efforts may also help them alleviate some unexpected phone volume related to vaccine questions, especially as they continue to conduct their ordinary business during this time. This is not a mandatory service for either OFA or the pharmacies, and some local pharmacies may find it more efficient for administration of services not to partner with OFA. Whether we partner or not, we know our Allegany County pharmacies provide dedicated and well-run services, and OFA fully supports and appreciates whatever efforts they make to help vaccinate our older adults.

As of this week, our local Department of Health may only vaccinate individuals considered “essential workers” under Phase 1B. However, we know that many older adults continue in the workforce beyond age 65 and that many serve as essential workers. Individuals that fall into both categories and have contacted OFA may be referred to “essential worker” clinics at the Department of Health as vaccine and registration openings become available. Additionally, we are working with our Veterans’ Service Agency to help them refer eligible veterans to any open vaccination clinics offered by the federal Veterans’ Administration. We will continue to look for additional local vaccination clinic sites to refer our older adults to.

If you wish to receive information regarding a specific vaccination site, such as the Alfred Pharmacy or Fillmore Pharmacy, please contact them directly. You may also continue to call OFA for information that is more general or vaccine registration assistance. At this time, OFA is only serving those age 65 and older in regards to COVID-19 vaccine information and registration assistance due to the current vaccine eligibility guidelines set by New York State.

We know this is a confusing and frustrating issue. Eligibility guidelines change frequently, as does guidance on what locations may vaccinate our older adults. We anticipate that vaccines will become more available in the coming weeks and months, and the need for a list of interested individuals will diminish. There may also come a time in the near future where more information and coordination is offered by the State or Federal government. In the meantime, we are available to assist locally with the best information we have available at the moment.

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