

# *Q&A – President Biden's Announcement About School Employee Vaccine Priority*

## **Background**

On March 2, 2021, President Biden announced that he expects all K–12 school employees to receive at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine before the end of March. To meet this directive, K–12 school employees were immediately moved to the currently eligible vaccination phase in Washington – Phase 1B, Tier 1.

## **Impacts of the Announcement**

### **Are school employees being moved ahead of those who are currently eligible?**

No. School employees are being moved into the currently eligible category, joining healthcare workers, first responders, and Washingtonians aged 65 and older.

### **When can school employees begin scheduling appointments?**

The Governor and Department of Health moved school employees to the currently eligible vaccination phase on March 2, meaning school employees can begin scheduling appointments immediately. However, the state's allocation of vaccine has increased only slightly so far, and progress is still being made to vaccinate all others eligible in Phase 1B, Tier 1. We urge school employees to remain patient, as vaccinations will be phased-in throughout the month.

### **Is OSPI's 'Get Ready' partnership with Kaiser Permanente still moving forward?**

Yes. OSPI and Kaiser Permanente are putting plans in motion that have been in the works since January of this year. Education staff are not limited to this option, though, and are encouraged to use any approved vaccine provider.

### **Will school employees in all areas of the state have access to vaccines?**

Yes. Between the 'Get Ready' partnership with Kaiser Permanente, local partnerships, and the Biden Administration's new push for vaccines through the Federal Pharmacy Program, school employees in every region of the state will have access to at least one dose of the vaccine by the end of March.

### **Which pharmacies are part of the Federal Pharmacy Program?**

There are six pharmacy chains in Washington that are part of the Federal Pharmacy Program: Safeway/Albertson's, Kroger (Fred Meyer/QFC), Costco, Walmart, Rite Aid, and Health Mart Independent Pharmacies.

## **How is the state prioritizing equity in vaccinations for school employees?**

The Department of Health continues to work to fulfill their priority of equitable distribution of vaccines. To meet the President's directive while continuing to make progress in vaccinating our healthcare workers, first responders, and those who are aged 65 and older, the state will first prioritize increasing vaccine allocations in geographic areas where:

- Many schools are already open for in-person learning, where school employees are in a congregate setting and need protection more quickly.
- The population is more racially and ethnically diverse. People of color have not received vaccinations proportionate to the population as a whole, and long-standing systemic health and social inequities have put many people of color at increased risk of illness from COVID-19.

## **With employees vaccinated, will schools reopen fully for in-person learning again?**

While some schools will be able to fully reopen for in-person learning, in most districts, they will need to utilize a hybrid model because they don't have the physical space necessary to bring all students and staff back *and* meet the current 6-foot physical distancing requirement.

## **With employees vaccinated, will schools need to continue following the health and safety requirements?**

Yes. Students are not expected to be vaccinated this school year, so schools will need to continue following all existing health and safety protocols.

## **Are vaccines required for schools to reopen for in-person learning?**

No. The data and research show that if schools follow all health and safety requirements, they can safely reopen without widespread vaccination within the school community. However, we know vaccination of school employees is an additional layer of protection that will provide comfort to staff, students, and families.

## **Information for School Districts**

### **We already have a vaccination clinic planned at one of our school sites.**

#### **Do we need to cancel?**

No. If you already have a plan and partnership with a local vaccine provider, the President's directive should not serve as a barrier to the continuation of your plan. It just means school employees will have more options for receiving their vaccination.

### **Should we begin planning for a clinic at one of our school sites?**

No. Unless planning for a school site-based clinic is already underway, it is unlikely that you will be able to mount a meaningful plan within the time that your staff could get scheduled and

receive appointments on their own. Instead, we recommend you focus your attention on sharing information with your employees about where to access vaccines.

### **Are district administrators included within this announcement?**

Yes. However, with limited vaccine supply, we encourage you to first prioritize your staff working in buildings before staff who may be working remotely or who are not serving students directly on a regular basis.

## **Information for School Employees**

### **Will I need to bring school identification to show I am eligible?**

School employees should first assess their eligibility through the [Phase Finder web form](#). If eligibility is confirmed, please print or copy the confirmation page and share it with your vaccine provider as proof of eligibility. In addition, we strongly encourage you to bring your school ID to your appointment. If you don't have a school ID, try to bring a letter on your school or district letterhead. Please note, this may not be needed based on the vaccine provider.

### **Will I need to pay for the vaccine?**

No. No matter which vaccine provider school employees use, the provider will bill the employee's insurance plan to cover the administration of the vaccine.