



GARY
VanDeaver
State Representative

***87th Legislature Report - House District 1
Bowie, Franklin, Lamar & Red River counties***

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Vaccine rollout going slow; more vaccines are needed. Since vaccines for the COVID-19 virus received emergency use authorizations from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) last month, my office has been monitoring the process to get "shots in the arms" of House District 1 constituents who want the vaccine. Federal and state plans call for the vaccines in category 1A to first go to health care providers and other workers in healthcare settings including nursing homes and long-term care facilities.

The Department of State Health Services (DSHS) chose just 34 counties to receive the initial distribution of 224,250 doses of the Pfizer vaccine for the first week of allocations beginning December 14, 2020. DSHS approved only certain providers in these counties due to the manufacturer's requirement that the vaccine be stored at super cold temperatures in freezers that are not found in all counties. As of January 7, 2021, all 254 counties have at least one approved provider and someone in all counties has received the first vaccination shot.

As these frontline workers were being vaccinated, the governor and state health officials then announced on December 21, 2020, that Texans in category 1B were now eligible to begin receiving vaccines. Those in the 1B category are people over 65 or people over the age of 16 with underlying health conditions. While this is great news, it has not been a smooth rollout to getting people vaccinated as providers were not fully prepared to cope with the dramatic and immediate increase in the number of people trying to get vaccinated.

Before a provider can distribute vaccines, it must register through the DSHS's enrollment website at [EnrollTexas@dshs.texas.gov](https://enroll.texas.gov). According to the DSHS website, "only providers registered through this site can receive and administer COVID-19 vaccine in Texas." The approval process can take up to 14 days, and businesses with multiple sites have to register each site that will administer vaccines.

My Capitol office has received many phone calls and emails from frustrated constituents, mostly in the 1B category, trying to get vaccinated. They have met confusion and delay. Just because a location or facility is an approved, registered provider does not mean it has stockpiles

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of vaccines on hand to administer. Decisions concerning distribution locations and amounts of vaccines shipped to approved providers are made by the commissioner of the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) after receiving recommendations of a 17-member Expert Vaccination Allocation Panel (EVAP) composed of medical, academic and public health experts, as well as state policymakers.

Some constituents believe the legislature decides which providers receive the weekly allocation of vaccines. Others contacting my office also believe that I can get them or their loved ones a vaccine. Please note that neither of these things are true or possible. As noted above, the DSHS commissioner is responsible for deciding which providers get the vaccines and how much they receive each week. To receive a vaccine from a provider, a person must register on that provider's website or call the provider directly to register for the vaccine.

On behalf of my constituents, I asked my staff to reach out to some of the approved providers in the area for more information and an explanation about these complaints. Providers shared several factors that contributed to the delay and confusion as outlined below:

- Providers had already used up their initial allocations of the vaccines;
- Providers had an existing waiting list of frontline workers in the 1A category;
- Providers were reserving doses to ensure those already vaccinated could receive the required second shoot within the required time window;
- Providers did not have an online appointment system operational; or
- Provider had not finished setting up a separate location to administer the vaccines to avoid comingling people in their facilities to minimize exposure to other people who might be infected with the virus.

If all of the above were not frustrating enough, in the middle of January the state switched its distribution plan to one using "mega hub" large providers that can vaccinate a total of more than 100,000 people. The DSHS January 7, press release announcing this plan states:

"Providers that receive the larger amounts of vaccine will vaccinate health care workers; people who are 65 and older, and those who have a medical condition that increases their risk of severe disease or death. They also agree to provide a registration phone number and website and focus on areas and populations hardest hit by COVID-19 while vaccinating people from surrounding areas."

The hub concept sounds good in theory, but it only works if there is a hub in your area. To date, there are currently no hubs located in my House District. I have been in contact with members of the EVAP letting them know of my frustrations with this allocation plan and asking why are people who live in the designated hub areas more important than the people who live in rural Northeast Texas. So far, I am still waiting, as are you who want to receive the vaccine as soon as possible.

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Unfortunately, getting the vaccination systems up and running is a marathon and not a sprint. Having had the coronavirus in October, I encourage people to consider taking the vaccine if it is right for themselves and their families, but in the meantime, I strongly encourage people to continue practicing social distancing, mask wearing and handwashing to minimize spreading the virus.

Social Media. Please follow me on both my Facebook and Twitter accounts!

My office is here to help. I thank each of you for letting me serve you as your state representative. Please contact either the District office (903-628-0361) or Capitol office (512-463-0692) if there is anything you think we can do to help you.