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COVID-19 Vaccines: Where do we go from here?

Brookings, S.D. – May 24, 2021 – On April 5, South Dakota officially entered phase 2 of the Department of Health’s COVID-19 vaccination plan, defined as a large number of vaccine doses available in the state. In the seven weeks since entering phase 2, less than 3,500 additional Brookings County residents have chosen to receive the vaccine. In comparison, nearly 5,800 Brookings County residents chose vaccination in the month of March alone, a time in which supply was limited and demand was high.

“Vaccine enthusiasm has definitely plateaued,” said Brookings Health System President and CEO Jason Merkley.

Up to this point, the health system has championed vaccine administration along with its local community partners in an effort to reach herd immunity. Experts state that herd immunity for COVID-19 happens when 70 to 90 percent of the population has either survived infection or received the vaccine. Vaccination is a safer path to immunity than infection. Based on Brookings County’s population, 24,500 to 31,500 people need to be vaccinated. As of Friday, only 13,937 persons in Brookings County have received at least one vaccine dose, 39.7% of the total population.

“Brookings County is no different than the rest of the state,” Merkley added. “Those who have wanted the vaccine have found a way to get it. Others are hesitant and have chosen not to receive the vaccine yet. Because of this shift in demand, it’s time to transition how we handle vaccinations and move toward a more traditional model like how we dispense flu vaccines. That means shifting from community vaccination centers that mass vaccinate people to appointments and walk-ins at the local pharmacies and clinics, enabling people to get a vaccine at the time they choose.”

Demand has dropped so much that for the past four weeks Brookings Health System has not ordered additional vaccine doses from the Department of Health, instead opting to use up the current supply of both Moderna and Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccines the health system is already storing. That supply has mainly been used at the community vaccination centers, also referred to as points of dispensing (PODs), held by the Brookings County Pandemic Planning and Coordination Committee (PPCC) at Swiftel Center.

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“The local clinics and pharmacies together have enough vaccine supply to meet current demand,” said Brookings County Emergency Manager Bob Hill. “The purpose of the PODs has been to dispense the COVID-19 vaccine rapidly to the community in the midst of this pandemic. That goal has been met. As long as supply and demand remain stable, the PPCC will most likely not hold further PODs for COVID vaccine distribution. Exceptions would be the need for boosters, vaccination approval for children under 12, or if there was a sudden surge in demand among the general public that that pharmacies and clinics couldn’t manage on their own.”

Last Thursday evening the PPCC held a special community vaccination center to administer the Pfizer vaccine following the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s recent emergency use authorization expansion for adolescents ages 12 to 15 years old. With 1,544 newly qualified 12 to 15 year olds in Brookings County to vaccinate, the PPCC made 500 vaccine doses available to anyone 12 years of age and older. Only 280 were administered.

“We will still hold the second dose Pfizer POD on June 9 for those who received their shot this past Thursday,” said Hill. “We may offer walk-in Janssen vaccines at that time, too, if supplies are still available.”

For others still waiting to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, doses are available when they decide the time is right for them. Vaccine availability at the local clinics and pharmacies include:

- **Avera Medical Group Brookings:** starting May 26, will administer Pfizer vaccines by appointment on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays during regular clinic hours, including evenings. Will vaccinate people ages 12+. Register
- **Sanford Health Brookings Clinic:** currently offers Moderna, Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) and Pfizer vaccines to non-vaccinated patients ages 12+ during regular clinic appointments. Also offers vaccines by appointment during specific, daily time blocks. Call (605) 697-1900 to make an appointment.
- **Hy-Vee Pharmacy Brookings:** currently administers Moderna, Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) and Pfizer vaccines on both a walk-in and appointment basis during normal pharmacy hours, including evenings and weekends. Will vaccinate people ages 12+. Register online at hy-vee.com/my-pharmacy/covid-vaccine.
- **Lewis - Brookings:** currently administers Moderna, Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) and Pfizer vaccines on both a walk-in and appointment basis during normal pharmacy hours, including evenings and weekends. Will vaccinate people ages 12+. Register online at lewisdrug.com/stores/lewis-brookings-sd.
- **Brothers Pharmacy:** currently administers Moderna vaccines on Thursdays and Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccines on Wednesdays. Vaccines are available by appointment or a walk-in basis for people ages 18+. Will also vaccinate on evenings and weekends. To register call (605) 692-2088 or visiting online at brotherspharmacy.net.
- **Brookings Walmart Pharmacy:** currently administers Moderna and Pfizer vaccines on both a walk-in and appointment basis during normal pharmacy hours, including evenings and weekends. Will vaccinate people ages 12+. Register online at walmart.com/COVIDvaccine.

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More information about the vaccines and their safety can be found online at brookingshealth.org/Vaccine.

About Brookings Health System

Brookings Health System, located in Brookings, South Dakota, includes a 49-bed hospital, the 79-bed The Neighborhoods at Brookview nursing home, Brookhaven Estates senior living apartments, Yorkshire Eye Clinic & Optical, and medical clinics in Arlington, White and Volga, South Dakota. It is a non-profit, city-owned facility that offers the community a full range of inpatient, outpatient, emergency and extended care services. Brookings Hospital provides local access to doctors in Brookings and offers robotic da Vinci surgery and Mako robotic-arm assisted procedures, making it one of the premier rural community hospitals in South Dakota. For more information about the services offered at Brookings Health System, please call (605) 696-9000 or visit us on the Web at brookingshealth.org.

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