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# Massachusetts hospitals to resume offering COVID-19 vaccine

After cutting off vaccine distribution to hospitals, the state has reversed course

By [Priyanka Dayal McCluskey](#) and [Felice J. Freyer](#) Globe Staff, Updated February 24, 2021, 6:21 p.m.



Richard Guarino delivered a batch of the Pfizer vaccine at Boston Medical Center in December. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF/ASSOCIATED PRESS

A week and a half after [abruptly cutting off new supplies](#) of COVID-19 vaccine to

hospitals, Massachusetts officials have reached an agreement with hospitals and health systems allowing them to rejoin the massive state effort to vaccinate all residents.

Under the plan, vaccine doses will be allocated to certain organizations willing to inoculate any eligible Massachusetts resident. Additionally, two health systems with large numbers of patients spread over a wide geographic area — Mass General Brigham and Beth Israel Lahey Health — can offer the vaccine exclusively to their patients.

The move comes as state officials work to accelerate vaccinations to meet the crush of demand from people 65 and older. Governor Charlie Baker said Wednesday that about [50,000 new appointments](#) would go live Thursday morning at the state's mass vaccination sites, in Foxborough, Boston, Springfield, Dartmouth, Danvers, and Natick.

Administration officials also said they would spend \$4.7 million to reach people who need vaccines in 20 communities most affected by the pandemic, focusing on people of color and people who are homebound and disabled.

The tussle over vaccine supply was a rare test of the relationship between the state's powerful hospitals and Baker administration officials, who talk regularly and have maintained a close relationship since the start of the pandemic.

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Hospitals were blindsided by the Feb. 11 decision to halt their new vaccine supplies and provide only enough for scheduled appointments and second doses. The administration said it would focus on [mass vaccination sites](#).

[The move was criticized](#) as undercutting efforts to reach people of color and communities hard-hit by the pandemic, and inconveniencing patients who preferred to get the vaccine from their hospital-based doctors.

“The administration understands the important role health systems play in the lives of residents of the Commonwealth and as such, the command center worked with the Massachusetts Hospital Association to provide a limited supply of vaccines to select hospitals and health systems,” said Kate Reilly, spokeswoman for the state’s COVID-19 Response Command Center.

The state plans to work with other health systems when the federal government significantly boosts the vaccine supply to the state, she said.

The agreement is the latest jolt in a tumultuous vaccine rollout that has zigged and zagged as the Baker administration has shifted policies in attempts to balance speed with equity, under the constraints of limited supply.

Hospitals — which have the resources to deliver tens of thousands of doses a week — welcomed the latest change.

After state officials told them to stop scheduling new appointments, Mass General Brigham officials had started closing most of their 12 vaccination sites across the state

— including in Chelsea, Lynn, Revere, and Jamaica Plain. But now they are working to keep the clinics open and are booking appointments this week to administer new first doses beginning Monday.

Dr. Tom Sequist, chief patient experience and equity officer at Mass General Brigham, said he's confident the health system will receive a stable supply of vaccines every week.

“We got word from the state that they were able to work on their vaccine distribution and that we'd be able to participate again, which we are obviously very happy with,” Sequist said.

In an e-mail to patients Wednesday, Mass General Brigham officials said they will invite eligible patients to schedule appointments through a “fair, random process.”

On Tuesday, Beth Israel Lahey Health notified about 232,000 of its patients who are eligible for vaccination that they would receive invitations to make appointments.

In an e-mail, Beth Israel spokeswoman Jennifer Kritz said: “We have been working collaboratively with the state and are pleased that we can resume contacting and scheduling eligible patients for vaccination at one of our 10 community-based vaccination sites.”

Officials at New Bedford-based Southcoast Health said they're planning to administer 4,100 first doses of vaccine this week, after the state replenished their supply. “Next week, we hope we get that many doses — or more,” spokesman Shawn Badgley said.

Dr. Eric W. Dickson, chief executive of UMass Memorial Health Care, said, “We greatly appreciate the governor's help in keeping our vaccine programs up and running.”

State officials have not said exactly how many doses hospitals will receive.

In addition to Southcoast, the health systems and hospitals that have agreed to hold public clinics are: Lawrence General Hospital, Boston Medical Center, Milford Regional Medical Center, Mercy Medical Center, UMass Memorial Medical Center, Marlborough Hospital, Cape Cod Hospital, Harrington Hospital, Baystate Medical Center, HealthAlliance, Heywood Hospital, Martha's Vineyard Hospital, and Nantucket Cottage Hospital.

Some but not all of the hospitals were listed on the state's vaccination website Wednesday.

Hospitals have spent many weeks preparing to vaccinate their patients — and the broader community — hiring and redeploying employees to administer vaccinations and signing leases to establish new community clinics.

They have been reaching out to patients by phone and e-mail, sometimes sending messages in Spanish, Haitian Creole, and other languages to urge them to get vaccinated.

“Hospitals will continue to execute the plans that they've developed and vaccinate as many people as they can under the guidance provided,” said Steve Walsh, president of the Massachusetts Health & Hospital Association. “Hospitals have been a significant player in every area of response to the pandemic, and vaccines will be no different.”

The governor, under pressure to step up vaccinations, has been shifting doses to mass sites. They can administer shots more quickly than other providers, such as hospitals, but they are accessible only to people who have cars and can travel many miles for their vaccinations.

The Baker administration has been supportive of [community health centers](#) as they ramp up efforts to reach people in some of hardest-hit neighborhoods. Pharmacies and local health officials are also administering vaccines.

Hospitals have received the bulk of the state's allocation of COVID vaccine to date, but that largely went to health care workers, who were the first people eligible to receive shots. Hospitals are still in the early stages of vaccinating their patients.

Baker told reporters Wednesday that his administration fields requests for 450,000 first doses of vaccine each week — but gets only 130,000 from federal officials.

“We told a number of the players in the provider world that there was going to be a pause on first doses,” he said. “We now know we’re going to get a little more than we got before. As time goes by, if we get any kind of significant increase in doses from the feds, you’ll see providers do a lot more vaccinating.”

Senator Becca Rausch, a Needham Democrat who has been critical of the state vaccine rollout, said she was glad to see administration officials sharpening their focus on equity.

The decision to send more doses to hospitals should help more people get vaccinated, she said. “They never should have been deprived of them in the first place.”

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