Alabama Health Organizations Recommend Alabamians Receive COVID-19 Vaccines to Help End Pandemic

Alabama's leading health organizations are joining together to strongly recommend Alabamians get the COVID-19 vaccine. Getting the vaccine can help stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus that has affected the lives of almost every Alabamian.

"Protection from COVID-19 through vaccination of the majority of people is critically important in reducing COVID-19 disease," said Dr. Scott Harris, State Health Officer. "COVID-19 vaccines have been shown to be safe and effective for men and women regardless of age or racial and ethnic group. We strongly recommend that adults protect themselves, their family, coworkers, friends, and community from severe illness and death by getting vaccinated when they are eligible. Vaccination will help advance the public health vision of healthy people, healthy communities, and a healthy Alabama."

The Alabama Department of Public Health, the Alabama Hospital Association, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, the Alabama Pharmacy Association, the Alabama Medicaid Agency, and the Medical Association of the State of Alabama are together confident in the vaccine's effectiveness and safety.

"Alabama physicians are no strangers to patient education and how it can ease hesitancy regarding vaccines. However, the public's uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine is unparalleled. Around 39% of Americans say they probably or definitely would *not* get a coronavirus vaccine," said Dr. John Meigs, President, Medical Association of the State of Alabama. "It's critical to help alleviate misunderstandings in order to overcome vaccine hesitancy.

"A top concern appears to be how quickly the COVID-19 vaccines have been developed. The first vaccines were distributed to the public in less than one year," added Dr. Meigs. "While there is an element of 'wait and see' to evaluate the full effectiveness of the vaccines, here is what we know so far: the available vaccines are up to 95% effective at preventing COVID-19, and the majority of side effects are very minor. We can start to renew the trust in our healthcare system now by shutting down divisive rhetoric and focusing on science. The road to recovery is long but will be possible thanks to the people of Alabama."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, vaccine safety is a top priority. Millions of people in the United States have received COVID-19 vaccines safely and with few side effects.

"As soon as individuals are eligible and the vaccine is available, we encourage every Alabamian to be vaccinated against COVID-19," said Dr. Don Williamson, President, Alabama Hospital Association. "Through vaccination, we not only protect ourselves, but everyone around us. These vaccines have undergone the most intensive safety monitoring in U.S. history and represent our best chance for the state and nation to return to a sense of normalcy."

Alabama pharmacies are a trusted source playing a crucial role in COVID vaccination administration and distribution across our state.

"We strongly recommend that every Alabamian who is eligible receive one of the safe, effective, and approved COVID-19 vaccines. Alabama's pharmacists have had the privilege of administering thousands of vaccines to patients in every community over the past few months," said Louise Jones, Chief Executive Officer, Alabama Pharmacy Association. "While we understand hesitancy with the unknown, we are confident in the vaccines we are administering to the patients who know and trust us. Pharmacists will continue to be available to answer questions and to vaccinate with confidence as more supply becomes available. Getting vaccinated is not only about protecting yourself, but protecting those around you."

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama is providing 100% coverage for the administration of COVID-19 vaccines during the government's phased-in vaccine distribution. Blue Cross members on individual, Medicare and almost all employer health plans will be able to receive a FDA-authorized COVID-19 vaccine without having to pay any out-of-pocket expenses.

"Alabama can overcome this healthcare crisis if we do our part by getting the COVID-19 vaccine," said Tim Vines, President and CEO, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama. "The health and wellness of our members and communities remains our top priority. We want to make sure our members have access to the COVID-19 vaccines without cost being an obstacle."

"I encourage all Alabamians, including Medicaid recipients, to get the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as they are eligible," said Stephanie Azar, Commissioner of Alabama Medicaid Agency. "There is no cost to recipients for the vaccine, and it can save lives and help slow the spread of the virus."

By taking preventive measures for protection, Alabamians can help end the pandemic in our state and nationwide. Along with getting the vaccine, continue to wear face masks, practice social distancing, and wash hands frequently.

For information on eligibility, vaccine safety, and to schedule a vaccination appointment, visit ALCovidVaccine.gov. For appointments, the public can also call **1-855-566-5333.**