



The Senate of The State of Texas

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January 21, 2021

Ms. Imelda Garcia
Chair
Expert Vaccination Allocation Panel
Austin, Texas

Dear Chair Garcia:

I want to thank you and all the members of the Expert Vaccination Allocation Panel (EVAP) for your hard work and commitment to Texas in this critical time. Many believed it would be impossible to produce a COVID-19 vaccine quickly and that there would be many months to plan the distribution of that vaccine. Instead, we got a COVID-19 vaccine in record time and I thank you for helping facilitate the speedy delivery in our state. Over a million people have been vaccinated so far in Texas – no small accomplishment.

However, as I and the members of the Texas Senate talk to Texans all over the state attempting to obtain vaccinations, it is clear there is a great deal of anxiety, frustration and confusion.

As you know, Texas currently is receiving about 300,000 doses per week, including doses for nursing homes, and it has taken us nearly seven weeks to vaccinate the first million Texans.

Health care providers and first responders were rightly designated as the first people to receive the vaccine. Shortly afterward, the 1B group of those over age 65 were added to the list in Texas of those who were eligible to be vaccinated. Those under age 65 with some chronic health conditions were also prioritized to get their vaccination. This combination significantly increased those eligible and exceeds the current supply of the vaccine that we receive from the federal government.

With more than 4 million Texans over the age of 65 and millions more with health conditions that put them at a higher risk for COVID-19, simple math makes it clear it will take us several months to vaccinate the current priority population.

I believe we need to refine our current vaccination rollout plan with two goals in mind:

- 1) To make sure we are vaccinating those who are at higher risk and,
- 2) To give Texans a clear idea as to when they can reasonably expect to be vaccinated.

Too many Texans are spending long days physically standing in line, calling a phone number repeatedly, and spending hours online, trying in vain to get a vaccination appointment. Demand clearly outstrips supply. While conditions do differ across the state, available appointments are often hard to find and they disappear quickly.

I believe we must bring more predictability to the process, so Texans can gain a more appropriate expectation of when they will be able to get their vaccination.

I urge you to consider creating some subgroups for prioritization within the 1B list so that the more than 4 million plus Texans and those with chronic conditions don't all expect to get their vaccination at the same time – something we know is not possible.

With over 29 million people in Texas, we know it could be late spring or even summer before everyone of any age who wants a shot can receive one. Currently, 700,000 Americans are being vaccinated every day. President Biden has pledged to increase the national number to a million a day, but even a million vaccinations a day means that it will be months before every American can be vaccinated.

Hopefully, as other manufacturers develop new vaccines, we will be able to shorten that timeline.

To provide Texans with clear information and to make sure we are targeting those who need the vaccine most, I ask that you consider adding some refinements to your vaccination rollout plan:

Once current vaccination appointments are honored, consider taking two weeks to vaccinate those who are 75 and over – a subset of 1B, the over 65 group. This will cut down on long wait times and begin to address the most vulnerable. There are less than 1.5 million in that group and some of them are already being vaccinated in nursing homes. If we focus on vaccinating that subgroup, many of our most vulnerable will be protected sooner rather than later.

Next, we could vaccinate all our teachers and school staff over 65. Keeping our schools open is essential and our teachers are critical to our future. Let's get those teachers who are most at risk vaccinated. Fewer than 60,000 teachers and school staff are over 65.

As we complete these subsets, we can vaccinate other 65 plus Texans by breaking them down into smaller groups. Some simple subgroups could be created based on an odd/even birth year, month or day. This would help give people an idea of reasonable expectations and reduce wait times and frustration each week.

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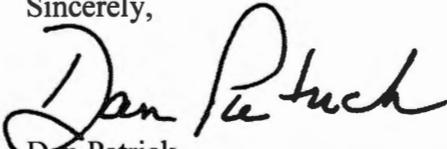
Right now, in many cities and counties when an announcement of available vaccinations is made, website sign-up pages crash and phone calls go unanswered. Additionally, we expect to receive over a million doses a month, but we have more than 4 million people over 65 and millions of others with chronic health conditions on our eligibility list. Texans need to have a better understanding of the time it will take for everyone to be vaccinated in order to reduce lines, confusion and frustration.

Of course, your expert panel may come up with better or different ideas than I have offered to give the public clearer guidance and predictability of when they can be vaccinated.

I want to thank Governor Abbott for his leadership on this issue. Texas is doing a good job rolling out the vaccine – better than most states.

I appreciate the work the EVAP is doing as we continue to meet the critical public health challenges of this pandemic. I look forward to your ideas on how we can refine our protocols and vaccine rollout timelines to better serve Texans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan Patrick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "D".

Dan Patrick
Lieutenant Governor

cc: Governor Greg Abbott