

The following email was sent to the URM research community on Thursday, Jan. 7. New York State approved [groups in Phase 1B](#) to be eligible for the COVID vaccine starting Monday, Jan. 11. The vaccination process is going, and as we move into Phase 1B more information will be shared about vaccine allocation to researchers.

Dear Colleagues,

As the COVID vaccination campaign is underway, we want to provide information specific to those who perform research in the School of Medicine and Dentistry. This group is large, and includes research faculty, staff, post-docs, fellows, students, research coordinators, and research nurses.

We know that many of you are anxious to receive the vaccine, concerned about when and how that will happen, and specifically have questions about when research personnel will be vaccinated. We have been working hard on implementing a vaccination plan for researchers.

Right now, New York State is strictly directing who can be vaccinated and in what order – [guidelines](#) that URM must strictly follow. The state's plan is divided into several phases. However, as of today, only specific guidance for who is included in Phase 1a has been provided. As you may know, Phase 1a directs vaccine only to those who are more likely to be exposed to the virus, like health care workers involved in direct patient care, and those who are more likely to become seriously ill if they get COVID-19, like nursing home residents. Please remember that this effort is only three weeks old, and the vaccine prioritization rules have been rapidly evolving.

The good news is that over 300 of our research faculty, post-docs, students, and staff have qualified and are in the process of being notified and vaccinated under Phase 1a criteria, including those who:

1. Are working with live SARS-CoV-2 virus in the BSL3 laboratory
2. Are working with unfixed lung tissue, nasal swab samples from COVID+ subjects (blood, serum, urine, and other non-respiratory tissues are not currently high risk)
3. Are seeing high volumes of study subjects that are known COVID+ for clinical trials
4. Are performing high-risk procedures on human subjects (pulmonary function testing, collection of respiratory samples, nasal swab samples, exercise stress testing)
5. Are performing study procedures with a high volume of human subjects unable to mask and at high risk of COVID (e.g. developmentally delayed adults and children)
6. Are performing in-person visits with study subjects necessary for interventional clinical trials (e.g. clinical trials with a treatment or procedure)
7. Are performing in-person visits that cannot be performed by remote technology in observational studies (blood draw, physiological measurements)

As Phase 1b guidelines are issued, or if Phase 1a guidelines change, we are hopeful that another targeted group of our research faculty and staff will be eligible as occurred with Phase 1a. For the remainder of URM faculty and staff who do not fall into Phase 1a or Phase 1b, it is still unclear what role New York State will allow URM to play in distributing the COVID vaccine like we do for influenza.

Additionally, it's important to keep in mind that the definition of "essential worker/personnel" you may hear in the news is different for *shutting down research* during a surge (medical research personnel are

considered essential, and can continue to work in New York State), versus *for vaccine prioritization* (essential means K-12 teachers, food and agriculture workers, police, firefighters, corrections officers, transportation workers, sanitation workers, utility company workers, etc.). This means that researchers who are not *directly, themselves*, performing human subjects research procedures that *require either direct contact (by the researcher) with human subjects or samples from COVID positive subjects* do not currently qualify as “essential” for the purposes of New York State vaccine allocation guidelines for Phase 1.

While many are anxious to receive the vaccine, remember that *everybody will be vaccinated eventually*, but when they are eligible and where they get the vaccine may differ. We are asking you to be patient, and to avoid the temptation to “jump the vaccine queue.” *There are now severe New York state fines and penalties for the institution and individuals for vaccinating people outside of the priority list order.*

Thank you all for your continuing patience during these trying times. Please know that we are advocating for you, and working diligently to support vaccine allocation to researchers within New York State guidelines. We will be regularly updating you as soon as we receive information from New York State. Information about safety/efficacy of the vaccine, FAQs and the most up-to-date status on faculty and staff vaccine eligibility is available on our [Coronavirus Vaccine website](#).

Stay safe.

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If you have any concerns about safety compliance or other issues related to work, please email research_covid_concerns@urmc.rochester.edu.