

COVID vaccinations expanding soon

‘When your time comes, do get the shot’

BY RANDY RIELAND AND
RACHEL NEEDHAM

For Rappahannock News and Foothills Forum

The circle of Rappahannock residents eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccinations is beginning to widen, with the announcement on Tuesday that Rappahannock County Public School teachers and staff will start receiving their vaccines this week.

The Rappahannock-Rapidan Health District (RRHD), which

serves the populations of Rappahannock, Fauquier, Culpeper, Orange and Madison counties, will soon begin delivering doses to people in Group B.

According to the state’s vaccine distribution plan, this includes people ages 75 and older and “frontline essential workers” such as teachers, child care providers, corrections staffers, grocery employees, migrant

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VACCINE

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farmworkers, veterinarians, mail carriers and “officials needed to maintain continuity of government.”

On Jan. 6, Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam set an initial goal of vaccinating 25,000 Virginians per day and announced that as the commonwealth receives more doses, the Virginia National Guard will “provide logistical support and help local health departments [with] administering vaccines.”

But so far the vaccine rollout has been slow in the state, with the Virginia Department of Health reporting a seven-day moving average of only 11,282 vaccines per day on Wednesday.

Locally, the VDH reports that 103 Rappahannock County residents have received their first dose of vaccine as of Jan. 13, about triple the number from the previous week.

Larry Grove, vice chair of the Rappahannock County Public School Board and president of the Sperryville Volunteer Fire Department, was among the first county residents to receive a dose of the Moderna vaccine in early January.

Grove told the News earlier this week that he had experienced no side effects or even soreness at the injection site. “It was smooth, easy — I didn’t even know I got a shot,” he said.

Grove explained that when he showed up at the Reva Volunteer Fire Department in Culpeper for his scheduled vaccination time slot, he showed the staff his driver’s license and a special code that had been sent to him on his phone when he made the appointment.

“Then you go in,” he said. “You get a piece of paper and they assign you to a seat. The nurse asks some more questions and then they give you the shot.”

He explained that after the shot was administered, staff advised him to wait in a socially-distanced room for 15 minutes to be monitored. Though adverse reactions to the vaccine are rare, Grove said, health workers are “being cautious.”

“At the end of 10 minutes ... the lady will ask you some more questions, how do you feel, and then they send you out the door.” Grove called the process “extremely well organized, adding, “I was very impressed.”

He expects to get his second and final dose on Feb. 2.

About 200,402 vaccinations have been administered to first responders like Grove at vaccination centers across the commonwealth, though the VDH’s reported number may lag behind the actual number as doses administered can take up to 72 hours to be entered into the Virginia Immunization Information System.

All told, just over 2% of the state’s population has received at least one dose since mid-December, but only 19,086 — .002% of the 8.5 million Virginians — are fully immunized. The percentage of partially inoculated residents in the RRHD is slightly lower than the state average at roughly 1.6%. Of the more than 180,000 residents of the RRHD, 345 are fully vaccinated.

As the number of those who qualify for the vaccine expands, the RRHD plans to add more vaccination locations and hopes to make appointments available on Saturdays. But those details are still

WHEN CAN I GET VACCINATED?

For more information and to find out when you might be eligible to receive the vaccine, visit the Virginia Department of Health website at vdh.virginia.gov. The VDH eligibility questionnaire can be found online at vdh.jebbit.com/amkwk6m1

being worked out, according to Dr. Wade Kartchner, RRHD’s health director.

The VDH is releasing a new eligibility questionnaire on its website that will help Virginians determine when they will qualify to receive the vaccine based on their locality, occupation, age, underlying medical conditions and other criteria. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents are able to provide their contact information so they can be reached with follow-up information and alerts.

Dr. Kartchner said that the VDH is also working on setting up a hotline for those who need assistance, and a staff member will walk through the questionnaire over the phone.

He said no proof of age will be required at vaccination sites, but those in essential worker groups (A, B and C) will need to bring an employment badge or pay stub, or wear a work uniform to their vaccination appointment to confirm their priority status.

While maintaining an adequate supply of vaccine doses to meet demand has been difficult in some locations, Dr. Kartchner said that so far the RRHD has been able to secure the number of doses it has requested from the state.

But as the number of people eligible to receive the vaccine — and therefore demand — expands, health departments statewide may face staffing challenges.

Though additional federal coronavirus relief dollars may help address that issue in Virginia, Dr. Kartchner said he will wait for the VDH to announce its priorities and see how much flexibility local health districts will have to allocate resources.

Another challenge for the RRHD has been getting a handle on how many vaccine-eligible people have chosen not to get a shot. April Achter, the RRHD’s population health coordinator, said there didn’t seem to be a lot of pushback from the health professionals in the “1A” vaccination category. But she acknowledged that it’s difficult to track how many people in a particular group don’t want to be vaccinated.

That’s why it’s critical, she said, to continue to debunk misinformation about the coronavirus vaccine, such as the bogus suggestion that it can cause COVID-19 disease or alter a person’s DNA.

Achter also stressed the importance of people following up with a second vaccination three to four weeks after the first shot. The second dose extends a person’s immunity much longer than a single vaccination alone.

Public health officials also continue to encourage everyone — even those who have been vaccinated — to wear face coverings, practice social distancing and wash their hands frequently. Because while the vaccine is 99% effective against the disease COVID-19, scientists still aren’t sure if it prevents a person from carrying and transmitting the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes the illness.

It’s strongly recommended that even those who have already contracted the virus get vaccinated.



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‘Am I eligible?’ — and other COVID-19 vaccine questions for Rapp residents



BY RACHEL NEEDHAM
Rappahannock News Staff

The COVID-19 vaccination campaign is underway in the Rappahannock Rapidan Health District that serves Rappahannock, Culpeper, Fauquier, Madison and Orange counties, albeit a slow start.

“Please understand that our health district, along with the rest of the state, is facing a severe shortage of vaccine in relation to the demand,” said Dr. Wade Kartchner, health director for the RRHD. “We will be expecting only 600-1,500 doses of vaccine each week for the next 4-8 weeks, and have nearly 25,000 people in the queue.”

Kartchner said the district is “working hard” to administer the vaccine as quickly as possible, but asked for residents of the district to be patient. In the meantime, the Rappahannock News is working to answer our readers’ most pressing questions.

Am I eligible to get the vaccine now?

You are eligible to get the COVID-19 vaccine in Virginia if:

- ▶ You are 65 or older.
- ▶ You are between the ages of 16 and 64 and have an underlying medical condition associated with increased risk for severe COVID-19 disease, including but not limited to: cancer, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, heart conditions, and obesity. Check the CDC website for a complete list.
- ▶ You are a resident or employee of a long term care facility.
- ▶ You live in a correctional facility, homeless shelter or migrant labor camp.
- ▶ You are a frontline essential worker. According to the Virginia Department of Health, this means “workers who are in sectors essential to the functioning of society, are at substantially higher risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2, and cannot work remotely.” Because there are not enough vaccines to inoculate everyone in this category at the same time, the VDH is prioritizing workers in the following order:
 1. Police, Fire, and Hazmat
 2. Corrections and homeless shelter workers
 3. Childcare/PreK-12 Teachers/Staff (public and private)
 4. Food and Agriculture (including veterinarians)
 5. Manufacturing
 6. Grocery store workers
 7. Public transit workers
 8. Mail carriers (USPS and private)
 9. Officials needed to maintain continuity of government (including judges and public facing judicial workers)

How can I sign up to get the vaccine?

Currently, the only way to sign up is online. For the latest information, go to the Rappahannock Rapidan Health District’s website at rrhd.org or to the district’s Facebook page.

“We expect our local supply to remain static until February or March,” said Dr. Kartchner, RRHD’s health director. Kartchner said that the

HEALTH DIRECTOR RETIRING

Dr. Wade Kartchner, the steady leader of the local pandemic response, announced on Wednesday that he is retiring from his position as health director for the Warrenton-based Rappahannock Rapidan Health District. His last day will be “on or around March 8.” ➔ [Story, Page 18](#)

“availability, allocation and administration is full of logistical challenges.”

To sign up for email updates about how you can sign up for your vaccination appointment, take the eligibility quiz on the Virginia Department of Health website.

Where can Rappahannock residents get the vaccine?

There is no vaccination center in Rappahannock at this time, so county residents must go to the designated RRHD vaccination center currently located in Culpeper. Once you sign up for a vaccination appointment, the RRHD will contact you with location details. April Achter, population health coordinator for the RRHD, told the Rappahannock News that they are “working with our local partners to plan for the future when vaccine availability increases.” Check the RRHD website for the most up-to-date site information.

How effective is the vaccine?

Several studies have shown that both Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are more than 95% effective when administered properly. Both vaccines require two doses. The second Pfizer-BioNTech dose must be administered at least 21 days after the first. The second Moderna dose must be administered at least 28 days after the first. Both first and second doses must come from the same manufacturer. The Moderna vaccine is approved for everyone ages 18 and older, and the Pfizer vaccine is approved for everyone 16 and older.

What are the side effects of the vaccine?

Side effects after any vaccine are normal signs that your body is building protection against infection. Some common side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine are pain and swelling at the injection site, fever, chills, tiredness and headache.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, it may be time to call your doctor if irritation at the injection site increases after 24 hours or if your side effects persist longer than a few days. For more information, read “What to Expect after Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine” from the CDC.

I’ve already had COVID-19. Do I need to get the vaccine?

Yes, but not right away. “If you’ve had a COVID-19 infection, you have enough immunity from that infection to last you 90 days until you would need to get vaccinated,” said Gary Matthews,

director of pharmacy for Fauquier Health. “If you should happen to develop an infection between the first and second vaccines, you should also wait 90 days before you get your second vaccination but you would not need to start over again.”

How does an mRNA vaccine work? Will it give me COVID-19? Will it alter my DNA?

The mRNA vaccine will not give you COVID-19 and it will not alter your DNA. Earlier vaccine technologies worked by introducing the human body to a weakened or inactive germ, but the mRNA vaccine works entirely differently. mRNA, or “messenger ribonucleic acid,” is a harmless molecule that instructs cells how to build proteins.

The mRNA in the vaccine against SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19 disease) tells cells how to build “spike proteins” that mimic the virus’s spikes. On a microscopic level, those spike proteins are what attach to receptors in the lungs, allowing the virus to infect the body. If you’ve seen an image of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, you’ve noticed that the virus itself is covered in a crown (or “corona”) of spikes — those are the spike proteins the mRNA tells your cells to make. The spike proteins trigger an immune response in the body, and the antibodies produced from that response will recognize the spikes on the SARS-CoV-2 virus and protect you if you are ever exposed to the real thing.

Should I be worried about the lack of data about the long term effects of the COVID-19 vaccine?

April Achter, population health coordinator for the RRHD, explained that longitudinal studies into the long term effects of the COVID-19 vaccine are ongoing, but assured readers that clinical trials must meet “rigorous criteria for safety and effectiveness before [any vaccine] can be authorized or approved for use.”

“The known and potential benefits of a COVID-19 vaccine must outweigh the known and potential risks of the vaccine,” Achter said. “mRNA vaccines are new, but not unknown. ... Researchers have been studying and working with mRNA vaccines for decades, for flu, Zika, rabies and cytomegalovirus (CMV).”

Is it safe for pregnant women to receive the vaccine?

As of yet, there is no safety data specific to pregnant women. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends that women who are pregnant or lactating consult with their healthcare provider before receiving the vaccine.

I have a history of severe allergic reactions to one or more of the COVID-19 vaccine’s ingredients. Should I get the vaccine anyway?

Cases of severe allergic reactions to the COVID-19 vaccines are rare — 0.2% of all vaccine recipients experienced an anaphylactic ➔



➔ reaction, according to a study by the CDC. However, The CDC says you **should not** get either of the available mRNA vaccines if you have a history of severe allergic response to any of the vaccine ingredients.

This includes anyone who has had an allergic reaction to polyethylene glycol (PEG) or polysorbate. PEG is a common ingredient in colonoscopy cleansing solutions, and it is an ingredient in both of the available mRNA vaccines. But allergies to PEG are very rare. A study conducted by the Food and Drug Administration between 2005 and 2017 found an average of only four cases per year of anaphylactic reaction to PEG.

“If these words don’t mean much to you, it’s probably safe to assume that you don’t have an allergic reaction to this,” said Amy Kaminski, vaccine coordinator for Fauquier Health.

If you have a severe allergic reaction to the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine, it is recommended that you do not get a second dose.

What about Rappahannock residents who

suffer specifically from the tick-borne “alpha gal” syndrome (meat and dairy allergy)?

UVA Health, which treats county residents suffering from alpha gal, stresses: “Our fund of knowledge on COVID and vaccination is evolving, so ... guidance is based upon currently available information.”

With the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID vaccine, UVA states: “Alpha-gal is not thought to present in the vaccine and thus alpha gal allergy/syndrome is not a contraindication to vaccine administration.”

That said, if prescribed an epinephrine auto injector it’s “a good idea to carry it with you on the day of your vaccination out of an abundance of caution.”

Also, the vaccine should be administered in a healthcare setting that is capable of treatment of anaphylaxis. Patients with a history of severe allergic reaction should be monitored for 30 minutes after injection.

Why do I have to get two doses of the vaccine? Why is one dose not enough?

Studies have shown that the two-dose series of

both Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are 95% effective against COVID-19.

In clinical trials, 98% of participants in the Pfizer-BioNTech trial and 92% of participants in the Moderna trial received two doses of each vaccine. That means that only 2% and 8% of participants in each trial respectively received only one dose. According to the Food and Drug Administration, those participants “were generally only followed for a short period of time, such that we cannot conclude anything definitive about the depth or duration of protection after a single dose of vaccine.”

Basically, there is simply not enough data to conclude that one dose on its own is effective.

I’ve received the COVID-19 vaccine series – do I still have to wear a face covering?

Yes, because scientists don’t yet know whether the vaccine prevents transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus to others. That’s why public health experts continue to encourage everyone — even those who have been vaccinated — to wear face coverings, practice social distancing and wash their hands frequently.

How many people need to be vaccinated in order to end the pandemic?

According to Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of NIAID and one of the nation’s leading infectious disease experts, told Virginians that in order to achieve herd immunity and end the pandemic, between 75 and 80 percent of people need to be vaccinated.

Will I be forced to get the vaccine?

The federal government does not require that individuals get vaccinated. However, some employers may mandate that their employees be vaccinated. Check with your employer to find out what policies apply to you.

RCHS to resume in-person classes on Thursday

BY RACHEL NEEDHAM
Rappahannock News Staff

Students at Rappahannock County High School will resume in-person classes today, Jan. 21, after an isolated outbreak of COVID-19 was identified on Monday. RCPS Superintendent Shannon Grimsley sent a message out to families earlier this week notifying them that the isolated outbreak was identified in association with the wrestling team.

“The investigation of the outbreak is complete and all individuals potentially exposed have been contacted and quarantined according to our health and safety plan. Wrestling activities, practices, and matches have been suspended for 14 days to adhere with quarantine procedures,” Grimsley wrote in an email on Tuesday.

Grimsley wrote in full:

“At this time, RCHS may proceed with in-person learning on Thursday, January 21. The school has been disinfected and will also be deep cleaned as usual on Wednesday, January 20 before students return on Thursday. Remember, if you or your child are ever identified as having been potentially exposed, the Rappahannock Rapidan Health Department or school nursing staff will contact you to ask that

you please stay home and monitor for symptoms of cough, shortness of breath, or a temperature higher than 100.4F, and practice social distancing for 14 days from your last contact. If you have not been contacted by the health department or school nurse, you do not need to stay home or exclude yourself from normal activities at this time.

“Parents should continue to monitor their child’s health and the health of their families for COVID-19 symptoms. Children with COVID-19 generally have mild, cold-like symptoms, such as fever, runny nose, and cough. Vomiting and diarrhea have also been reported in some children.

“Children with certain underlying medical conditions, such as chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma, serious heart conditions, or weak immune systems, might be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Contact your child’s healthcare provider regarding any concerns.

“People without symptoms do not need to seek care or be tested. Those who become ill should contact their healthcare provider. Their doctor, in consultation with public health officials, will determine appropriate care and whether testing is necessary. If

your child has been exposed to or diagnosed with COVID-19, please report this to your school. This information will be kept confidential. If your child is tested, please ensure your child stays home until test results are reported.

“Schools continue to utilize Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations on Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, to reduce viral transmission and keep our children and school personnel healthy and safe. Parents and family members can assist this effort by promoting healthy behaviors and following these practices:

▶ Stay home from school or work if sick, even if symptoms are mild.

▶ Wear a face covering in areas where physical distancing is difficult to maintain.

▶ Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue (or sleeve), and then throw the tissue in the trash. Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

▶ Wash your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol.

▶ Avoid touching the eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.

▶ Clean and disinfect surfaces that are often touched.

▶ Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

▶ Take care of your health overall. Stay current on your vaccinations, including the flu vaccine, eat well, and exercise to help your body stay resilient.

“The Virginia Department of Health provides information about COVID-19 and frequently asked questions (FAQ) from parents and concerned family members. The CDC offers tips to keep children healthy during this time. The Virginia Department of Education’s produced COVID-19: A Parent Guide for School Age Children and provides additional considerations for students with disabilities, guidance for military families and social emotional wellness for parents and caregivers.

“Thank you very much for your cooperation in helping us keep our school community healthy. Your commitment to this mission is the reason our school community transmission rate remains so low. To continue to keep schools operating in-person, we will need to continue to work together. As always, the safety and well-being of all students, staff, and families continues to be our highest priority.”

Local groups reach out to seniors to help with vaccine effort

A big focus: Bridging a digital divide that hampers signing up for shots

BY SARA SCHONHARDT
For Foothills Forum

As the coronavirus vaccine rollout continues to stutter along in Virginia, local service organizations and community groups are reaching out to Rappahannock County seniors to provide information and assistance with vaccine registration.

Much of that outreach is aimed at tackling a problem exposed by the state's online registrations systems: A digital divide among older residents who lack computer skills or internet connections.

Social and economic divides that inhibit people from getting to vaccine sites can add to the challenges.

In Virginia, the main way to register for a vaccination is through an online survey managed by each health district, the Rappahannock-Rapidan Health District (RRHD) in the case of Rappahannock County. People without computer access can call the health dis-

trict's helpline to get assistance filling out the survey, but calls aren't always answered due to high demand.

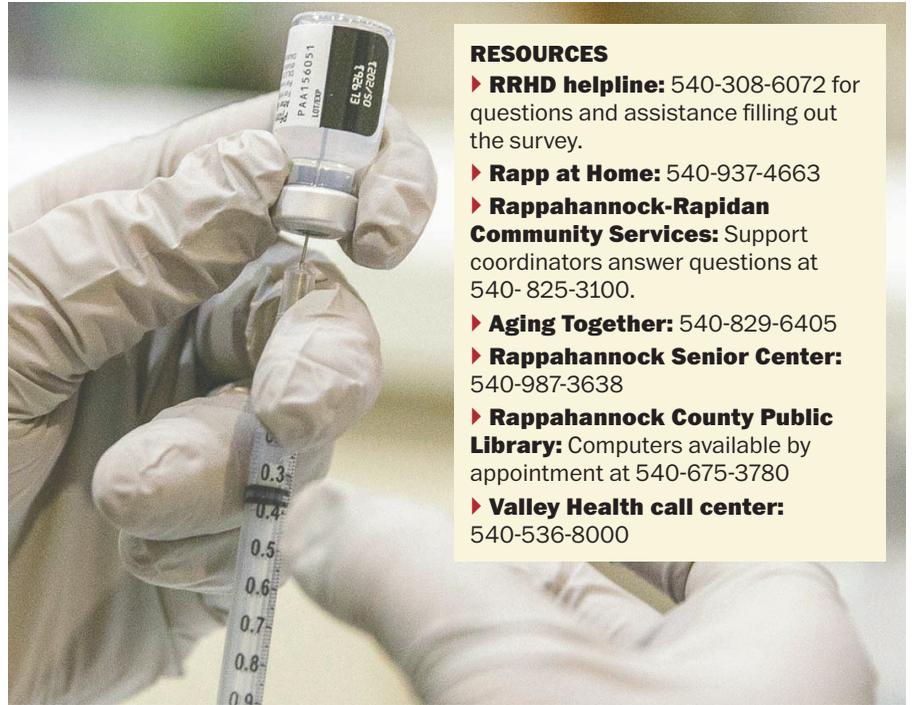
And while the online form isn't complicated, one reader told the Rappahannock News that she received no email confirmation after submitting it, leaving her to wonder if and when she would be notified that she had an appointment. April Achter, RRHD's population health coordinator, said sometimes confirmation emails go to people's spam folders.

Tiger Valley resident Sandra Antony, 74, helped her sister get an appointment at Valley Health, which was releasing a limited number of slots each weekday at noon. But she said the process felt like a race to fill out registration forms before available openings filled up.

"This requires patience, a fast finger in filling out the forms and the realization that you may be back in the same place the next day trying again," she said.

Amid these challenges, however, one thing Rappahannock does have are people willing to help.

Kathryn Treanor, member services coordinator at the senior nonprofit Rapp at Home, is offering to sign up



BY PAUL LARA FOR INSIDENOVA

RESOURCES

- ▶ **RRHD helpline:** 540-308-6072 for questions and assistance filling out the survey.
- ▶ **Rapp at Home:** 540-937-4663
- ▶ **Rappahannock-Rapidan Community Services:** Support coordinators answer questions at 540-825-3100.
- ▶ **Agging Together:** 540-829-6405
- ▶ **Rappahannock Senior Center:** 540-987-3638
- ▶ **Rappahannock County Public Library:** Computers available by appointment at 540-675-3780
- ▶ **Valley Health call center:** 540-536-8000

There are more than 25,000 people on our region's vaccine wait list.

eligible residents who don't have consistent internet access — about eight percent of their members — as well as any other residents who call requesting assistance.

The survey form requires an email address, but Treanor enters her own and makes a note that the applicant doesn't have an email and should be called directly to schedule an appointment.

So far she's signed up fewer than 10 people over the past two weeks, but she expects that number to go up as Rapp at Home continues sending updates to members through direct mail.

"As much as anything else, it's difficult for people to get information if they don't have access to the internet because so much information is coming out to people that way," Treanor said.

Darcy Canton at the Rappahannock Senior Center has called its 45 members to explain how to register for an appointment and provide them with the web address and phone number of the RRHD helpline. She can also help people find rides to vaccine sites through the center's volunteers with a few days' notice.

Rapp at Home is also looking to provide transportation to appointments once more of its volunteers have received their full vaccinations and Canton and Treanor are working to coordinate their efforts.

Pastor Jessie Colwell at Rappahannock Charge UMC said she's had individual conversations with her congregation and offered to sign them up online.

Still, many residents are sharing information and links to appointment sites like Valley Health through Facebook, email or community listservs, which means not everyone has equal access.

Ellen Phipps, executive director of Culpeper-based Agging Together, a collective of organizations assisting seniors, said one of the greatest obstacles

to connecting older adults to resources is the ability to reach rural, isolated seniors not connected to the internet.

"Access to information about critical services and basic healthcare can often be the difference between remaining at home with support or not and overcoming barriers to social isolation," she said. "And isolated seniors may be unaware of programs and services that can help — such as food pantries; home care, free transportation, caregiver support or vaccine information."

Agging Together has been working with regional partners like Rappahannock-Rapidan Community Services to develop resource guides and provide iPads to seniors at long-term care facilities to connect with family and activities.

WHERE VACCINE EFFORTS STAND

Virginia is currently inoculating people under Phase 1b, which includes anyone over the age of 65. But demand has far exceeded supply.

During a briefing before the Board of Supervisors Monday, Dr. Wade Kartchner, RRHD director, said the health district is receiving about 2,000 doses a week, but there are currently more than 25,000 people on the vaccine wait list across its five county service area.

"So unless we get more allocation, it's going to take us a good amount of time to burn through the people that are currently on those lists," he noted.

RRHD is working with Fauquier Health and Piedmont Family Practice, which will get 320 and 100 vaccine doses a week, respectively, to cover Rappahannock and Fauquier counties. Achter said its sharing portions of its survey list with each hospital as they set up vaccine clinics. Rappahannock County's Department of Social Services is also working to identify people who are eligible to receive the vaccine to see if they want to be placed on a waitlist.

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CVS vaccine program sends local health districts scrambling

Many details yet to be worked out; vaccine appointments begin Friday

BY RACHEL NEEDHAM
Rappahannock News Staff

This week CVS Health will become the first pharmacy in the commonwealth to offer vaccinations through the Federal Retail Pharmacy Program, but Virginia health officials are expressing frustration over the logistical hurdles to rolling out the pharmacy program equitably.

Nationally, CVS is launching vaccine programs in 11 states including Virginia. Eligible Virginians will be able to sign up online starting Thursday, with vaccine appointments beginning on Friday.

Amy Thibault, senior manager of corporate communications for CVS said the company is expecting to distribute 26,000 doses of the Moderna vaccine to 36 select pharmacies each week.

“Specific CVS Pharmacy locations within these 11 states have been chosen based on population density and demographics including the CDC’s Social Vulnerability Index, with the goal of reaching the most in-need populations. We also selected locations with layouts best suited for setting up vaccination

clinics and the ability to safely manage social distancing within our stores,” Thibault wrote in an email to the Rappahannock News.

The participating pharmacies may change “regularly,” Thibault said, in order to “prevent stores from being overwhelmed by those who may seek a vaccination without making an appointment.” For that reason, there is currently no list of CVS locations that are actively administering vaccines.

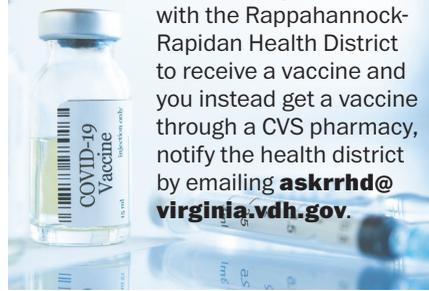
In a press release, CVS said it will initially limit appointments to individuals who are 65 and older and to those who have already pre-registered with their local health department first. Then, beginning next Thursday, Feb. 11, anyone who is eligible under Virginia’s Phase 1b guidelines can sign up for a vaccine through the company’s website.

Over the last few weeks tens of thousands of Virginians have pre-registered to receive the vaccine through their local health departments, providing those departments with a list of people who are currently eligible for vaccination under Phase 1b.

“The goal was to have CVS be able to pull from those health departments’ lists of pre-registered individuals who are 65 years of age and over and preferentially enroll those individuals for appointments,” said Dr. Danny Avula, the state’s vaccine coordinator.

LET THE HEALTH DISTRICT KNOW

If you are registered with the Rappahannock-Rapidan Health District to receive a vaccine and you instead get a vaccine through a CVS pharmacy, notify the health district by emailing askrrhd@virginia.vdh.gov.



But for various reasons, Dr. Avula said, CVS was unable to offer a technical solution that would allow it to pull from the local health department wait lists. “What that has led to is that anybody who was on the internet trying to get an appointment through CVS could go in and make an appointment,” he said.

“We’re really trying our best to ensure that people who have been waiting in line have access. There isn’t a way that favors people who have good internet access. There isn’t a way [to control] for people who get up super early and are trolling the internet. That’s the core fundamental issue with how this rolled out,” he said, noting that some health directors had likened it to people queuing up to get the best concert tickets.

“This is an issue both of fairness for people who have pre-registered and have been waiting, but also of equity because for low-income or non-English speaking or people who don’t have good internet access, this is not a system that allows equitable access and so that’s what we’re fighting for,” Avula said.

At the local level, April Achter, population health coordinator for the Rappahannock Rapidan Health District, says

they didn’t get enough advance notice about the CVS program to put a coordinated system in place.

“Our folks at the office are looking at that process to see how we can partner moving forward,” Achter said.

But because the Virginia Department of Health and CVS do not have a shared list of eligible individuals yet, they also have no way to alert one another when an individual who is on a health department waitlist has been vaccinated at a pharmacy.

In the long term, though, Achter hopes that there will be some coordination among vaccine administrators using the Virginia Immunization Information System, a database that allows state health workers to know which residents have received vaccines.

“We don’t want to hold anyone up from getting a vaccination. Wherever the opportunity presents, we want them to take that opportunity. We will simply take them off our list and it moves everyone else up the queue,” Achter said. At least for now, Achter said, this will have to be done manually, with individuals notifying the RRHD via email if they have received a vaccine through an alternative channel.

At a press conference last week, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam told his constituents to “stay tuned and be assured this [CVS program] is only the first phase of the rollout of the federal pharmacy partnership.” Northam said the state was actively working with Walmart, Walgreens and Kroger pharmacies to expand the availability of vaccines.

Sara Schonhardt contributed to this story.

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Candace Simpson, CPNPC-PC, IBCLC



BY THOMAS PELLIKAAN

Pristine blanket of snow

The viewshed of Eldon Farms and beyond it the Blue Ridge Mountains – shrouded here by winter storm clouds on Sunday morning – is ever-changing from the vantage point enjoyed by Thomas Pellikaan, who resides at Oak Crest on Red Oak Mountain. The month of February is making up for any lack of snow Mother Nature hasn’t delivered of late to Rappahannock County.

► More snow photos, page 21

As vaccine rollout advances, concerns over equity, access remain

‘We just don’t have enough vaccine right now for all the folks who want it’

BY SARA SCHONHARDT

For Foothills Forum

The COVID-19 vaccine rollout has picked up speed in Virginia recently. More doses are expected to arrive in the coming weeks and a new statewide registration system is up and running. More pharmacies, including Walgreens, Walmart, Food Lion, Martin’s, Harris Teeter and Kroger are approved to begin providing shots in the coming weeks and community groups are offering to help sign people up.

But hundreds of people continue to languish on wait lists hoping for an appointment. Across Virginia residents have complained about long waits for appointments, challenges navigating websites and the lack of communication from those managing registrations.

See **VACCINE**, Page **12**

VACCINE

From Page 1

The state's current system of allocating vaccine doses based on population has also received criticism from politicians for failing to account for the needs of the most vulnerable Virginians, including those in rural areas. More recently the state has discussed re-prioritizing the way it allocates vaccines so that it reaches areas hit hardest by the disease.

During a press call last Friday, Dr. Danny Avula, the state's vaccine coordinator, said the Virginia Department of Health recognized the need to reconsider the way it's been distributing vaccines, with an added focus put on priority populations. In the coming weeks, he said, he expects the state to put a weighted distribution model in place that prioritizes people 65 and older, specifically Black and Latino residents, and those who live in places where rates of hospitalization and death are high.

Rappahannock resident Donald Porter, who is about to turn 73, said he thinks the system is only working for those who are well-connected.

He said he wants to know who the more than 1,300 Rappahannock residents who've received their first vaccine are, because he knows it's not him or his wife Shirley, or his 84-year-old sister. He suspects that younger people are getting vaccinated ahead of those who are more vulnerable and that people are jumping the line due to connections.

"I think right now it's who you know that is getting the shot, and until I see something different, that's my opinion," he said.

Other residents have similar concerns.

"I have signed up online and via phone. Still no vaccine appointment. I'm fed up. ... I bet all the rich folks in Rappahannock are the ones who have gotten [the] vaccine to date," one resident said in a message to the Rappahannock News.

For Donald, the biggest challenge with the vaccine process has been the lack of information. He said it took him and Shirley until February to register because it took that much time — and assistance from some acquaintances — to figure out how to go about it.

"We think we've done everything right," he said. He and his wife Shirley registered for an appointment earlier this month and still don't have an appointment. When he tried calling the health department, he said he got an automated answering system and didn't know where to direct his call.

Shirley, who freely admits she is not very savvy with technology, filled in the registration survey through the Rappahannock-Rapidan Health District (RRHD) website on Feb. 6. She said they got an email confirmation that acknowledged it could take some time to schedule an appointment.

Then they registered on the statewide site once it launched on Feb. 16. Shirley said her understanding was that by registering on that site it would put them on the list for whatever appointments came up first, whether through the health district, CVS or otherwise.

"Bottom line is, if it's life and death, you register any way you can," Donald said. "Hopefully, something will come through sooner rather than later."



Still falling short

April Achter, the population health coordinator for the RRHD, said she knows people are frustrated and that the transition to the centralized system has initially made things more confusing (for one thing, the call center asked people to re-register when they didn't need to).

"We just don't have enough vaccine right now for all the folks who want it," she said.

Under the current distribution system, Achter said, RRHD is using multiple strategies to reach residents: scheduling appointments from the registration list; allocating doses to providers so they can reach their own patients; and doing outreach to churches, seniors and community groups that can help people sign up.

"Moving forward, we absolutely want to make sure that we are approaching vaccine in an equitable manner so

"We're just trying to identify as much as possible patients who are at risk and not necessarily on a computer and tech-savvy," said von Elten. The problem with only having people sign up online, he added, is that his patients who need the vaccine the most often don't have ready access.

Providers aren't required to provide data on race and ethnicity when reporting vaccine metrics to the state, but according to available data on the Virginia Department of Health's website as of Feb. 23, more than 747,000 White Virginians have received at least one dose of vaccine compared to 126,955 Black residents and 59,161 Latino residents. Data for 589,478 people was not provided.

Black residents, meanwhile, account for 42% of all COVID-19 cases and 38% of total deaths, and the CDC reports higher rates of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths for Black and Latino populations, noting that race and

**Rappahannock resident Donald Porter:
"Not all of us are afraid to take the shot.
Just give me the opportunity, that's all I ask."**

that everyone in our community who desires to be vaccinated has the opportunity to do so," she said.

Dr. Steven von Elten, a provider at Piedmont Family Practice in Warrenton, one of two private providers receiving vaccine doses from the federal allocation, said he worries the state doesn't have the capability to identify people who are at the highest risk and that its current policy is discriminatory.

"Some people, you need to talk to them, you need to explain the vaccine," he said, noting that patients have reservations for a variety of reasons. "We have to come to recognize that's how we'll be ultimately successful, and at some point we're going to have to have a change of mindset."

His office, which was initially allocated 100 doses a week, has been reviewing patient records to identify which individuals are over the age of 65 and have comorbidities, such as diabetes or heart disease, and are therefore most at risk for severe COVID-19 disease. Of the practice's 31,700 patients, he said more than 6,120 are 65 and over. The office is calling those patients directly and arranging vaccine appointments by phone.

ethnicity are risk markers for other underlying conditions that affect health, including socioeconomic status, access to health care, and exposure to the virus related to occupation

Earlier this month, Virginia Congressman Donald McEachin, a Democrat from the 4th district, sent a letter to state health officials stating his concern that rural communities and communities of color would be hardest hit by what he called "a lack of coordinated distribution and administration efforts."

People most in need — including frontline workers and the elderly — can be hard to reach. They may face language barriers or live in low-income households and may not have the technology or transportation at their disposal to make an appointment. Even standing in line can be too challenging for the most vulnerable Virginians.

There are also concerns about vaccine hesitancy, particularly among communities of color that have experienced a history of medical abuse.

Donald, an African-American man, says that's not what's holding him back.

"Not all of us are afraid to take the shot," he said. "Just give me the opportunity, that's all I ask."

Signs of movement

On Tuesday Castleton residents Laura Matthews, 68, and her husband Colin, 67, landed appointments to get their vaccines on March 2 at the Germanna clinic in Culpeper, bringing a wave of relief after more than a month of waiting.

Laura said she completed the RRHD survey back in mid-January and didn't receive a confirmation email until three weeks after she inquired. Colin, who has underlying conditions, was growing increasingly impatient, so she started pursuing other avenues that people had told her about and regularly checked the CVS website after it started offering appointments on Feb. 9. She was looking as far away as Roanoke but everything was full and she started to think it could be months before they'd get an appointment.

And then the call came. Laura said the woman on the phone answered her husband's questions before he could even ask them.

"If they're registered, I now have faith that they will get a call," she said.

Mimi Forbes, director of the Rappahannock County Food Pantry said 35 of her volunteers received their first vaccine at Germanna on Feb. 10 and 11 and found the process very organized and efficient.

In addition to the pharmacies and local providers, Dr. Avula said vaccines will also start going to clinics that are federally funded and serve un- and under-insured populations in Virginia through the Federally Qualified Health Centers program.

The RRHD hasn't been allocated additional doses beyond the 2,075 it's getting currently, but Achter said they are prepared to accept more.

"If we get more vaccine we will simply increase our access points in the district and any time you increase your access points you increase your equity," she said. They're also planning to work with partner providers and hospitals to target specific communities that they may not have been able to reach, such as churches, migrant camps, those that have trouble with transportation, and areas that don't have access to a doctor or a pharmacy, Achter added.

How are people getting vaccinated?

The main way to register is through the centralized online system at vaccinate.virginia.gov, which asks residents to fill in a survey that places them on a waiting list. RRHD has been calling people individually from the list to schedule appointments due to glitches in the scheduling system, PrepMod, that allowed anyone with a link it emailed out to make an appointment.

RRHD runs a vaccine clinic four days a week at the Germanna Community College in Culpeper and pulls names from the waiting list for appointments, as does Fauquier Health, which is also receiving federal allocations of the vaccine for Rappahannock residents. Piedmont Family Practice is scheduling appointments directly with its patients only at this time.

Vaccinations proceed – with some confusion and questions

What's coming up, how the local pharmacy programs work, and how to make sure you're registered.

BY RACHEL NEEDHAM

Rappahannock News Staff

Dr. Danny Avula, Virginia's state vaccine coordinator, said last Friday that by mid-April, Virginians in category 1c will be eligible to receive a COVID-19 jab. Group 1c includes essential workers in energy, construction, food service, transportation, higher education, finance, legal services, public safety, information technology and media. The window for that group will be relatively short, Avula said, and by May 1, every adult in the commonwealth will be eligible for a vaccine.

"The months of April and May are going to be our highest supply totals and our highest outputs and

See **VACCINE**, Page 5

VACCINE

From Page 1

really where I think we can make significant progress on getting our state vaccinated," Avula said. And the Virginia Department of Health has set the ambitious goal, he added, of administering at least one dose to every Virginian who wants one by May 31.

Between the federal pharmacy partnership and the state's vaccine program, more than 55,000 Virginians are getting vaccinated each day. He said in most places in the state, vaccinators are "pretty deep into the 65 and up lists ... I imagine we will be through the 65 and up category if their registration is correct in the next couple of weeks."

But despite the good news, some eligible Rappahannock residents still haven't been able to get their shots. "I've registered on the VA site, and have not gotten any recent updates, yet all around me I hear about fellow citizens getting the vaccination outside of the Rappahannock Rapidan Health area and people getting vaccinated at the CVS in Warrenton, etc, etc," wrote a frustrated Alan Zuschlag on Facebook. "Yet, when I try to pursue such options I get no headway. How are people able to circumvent the queue? Or are there other options out there that I'm not aware of?"

"It is a little bit confusing and that's

MORE COVID COVERAGE
Rates of vaccine hesitancy highest in rural areas • Page 18

unfortunate," said Dr. Colin Greene, director of the Rappahannock Rapidan Health District. "But there are two different pharmacy programs. The first one is the federal pharmacy program where certain pharmacies get vaccines directly from the federal government," he said.

"And then the other is just local pharmacies with whom the Rappahannock Rapidan Health District has arranged to share vaccines with so they can actually administer them."

For eligible vaccine recipients, the most relevant difference between the federal and local pharmacy programs is this: local pharmacies are plugged into the VDH's database, but the federal pharmacies are not.

That means that CVS, Walmart, Walgreens, Giant, Martin's, Kroger and any other Virginia pharmacy receiving doses from the federal partnership has its very own vaccine registration portal.

"The health department and the hospital partners are mostly pulling off that vaccinate.virginia.gov list, but I can't swear to you that every last pharmacy is doing that. So the best thing would be to check the pharmacy's website and see what the best place to sign up is," Greene said.

Greene explained the reason they're not all using the same database is because of statewide software snafus making it difficult to "[get] one system to download to the other in a secure way ... and in a correct way where it doesn't mix up boxes with first and last names."

Vaccination help

HOW TO REGISTER

All adults who want a COVID-19 vaccine must pre-register with the Virginia Department of Health at vaccinate.virginia.gov, or call **1-877-VAX-IN-VA (1-877-829-4682)**.

WHAT IF YOU'RE ELIGIBLE, REGISTERED AND HAVEN'T GOTTEN A CALL?

Dr. Danny Avula advised anyone in the 1b eligibility group to make sure their information is updated in the state's system if they haven't yet received a call. "It's possible that they perhaps spelled an email address wrong, or didn't provide a phone number, or just need to kind of update their date of birth information because we did have a lot of incomplete records," he said.

There are no available walk-in vaccine clinics in our area at this time.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT LOCAL VACCINATION EFFORTS

- ▶ **Rappahannock Rapidan Health District:** rrhd.org
- ▶ **Fauquier Health:** fauquierhealth.org/covid-19-vaccination-information
- ▶ **Valley Health:** valleyhealthlink.com/patients-visitors/coronavirus-covid-19-updates/covid-19-vaccinations

'FEDERAL PHARMACIES' WITH VACCINE DOSES IN OUR AREA

People who are eligible for vaccination and are interested in getting vaccinated at their local pharmacy should check the pharmacy's website to find out if vaccine is available.

- ▶ **CVS** (Culpeper, Front Royal, Luray, Warrenton): cvs.com/immunizations/covid-19-vaccine
- ▶ **Giant** (Warrenton): giantfood.com/pages/covid-info
- ▶ **Martin's** (Culpeper, Front Royal): martins-supermarkets.com/covid-19-vaccine
- ▶ **Walgreens** (Culpeper, Warrenton): walgreens.com/topic/promotion/covid-vaccine.jsp
- ▶ **Walmart** (Culpeper, Front Royal, Luray, Warrenton): walmart.com/cp/1228302

WHERE TO FIND VACCINATION CENTERS

For an updated list of vaccination centers in our area, check out **Vaccine Finder**, a tool available online at vaccinefinder.org/search/.



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Rates of vaccine hesitancy highest in rural areas

Health Director: “There are dozens of different reasons and points of view as to why someone might or might not want [a vaccine].”

BY RACHEL NEEDHAM
Rappahannock News Staff

In order to bring the COVID-19 pandemic to an end, public health experts say between 75 and 80 percent of Americans will need to get the vaccine. Early on, doctors worried that Black Americans especially would hesitate to get a vaccine due to medical racism and abuse in the past. But in fact, the highest rates of vaccine hesitancy — in Virginia, anyway — are among White Republicans in rural areas.

A recent poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that 42 percent of Republican respondents and 17 percent of Democrat respondents are still unsure about the vaccine.

And some people in Rappahannock County are unsure, too.

‘IT’S REALLY ABOUT THE UNKNOWN’

Connie Smith Reid, 56, told the Rappahannock News this week that while she’s not an anti-vaxxer she is also not

crazy about the idea of the vaccine. She and her husband have already made the decision not to vaccinate their 17-year-old son. (Despite her concerns, Reid, who was eligible for the vaccine in group 1b because of her childcare business, got the shot at the request of her elderly parents so she could care for them in an emergency.)

“There are several reasons that I was very hesitant,” Reid said, “and one of them [was] that it was developed quickly. Saying that, I’m thankful that there is a vaccine right now. My parents are almost 80 and they want the vaccine. I totally understand people wanting the vaccine.”

But for herself, her husband and her three children, Reid is worried about the lack of long-term study and the potential effects. “For instance, for my daughter to get it, will it cause birth defects?”

Health officials say there is no evidence to suggest women who are pregnant or may become pregnant will be negatively impacted by the vaccine, but Reid is not so easily persuaded. “It’s very hard to trust anything they say because they change it weekly,” she said. “I mean truthfully they change it weekly. Dr. Fauci is on video [saying] masks won’t help you. Then, wear a mask. Then, wear two masks.”

Reid wears a mask when she goes out, she said, because she doesn’t want “the anxiety of the looks ... or to put the proprietor, who’s an employee, in the posi-

tion where they have to tell me to put on a mask.”

But Reid believes the decision to wear a mask should be a personal one, just like the decision to get a vaccine.

Bonnie McAlpin Reading, 29, is another county resident who is unsure about the shot. She and her husband, William Reading, 27, moved to Woodville in October 2020. “Honestly both of us are really healthy individuals and ... we felt pretty confident that we wouldn’t be at risk for a severe reaction from COVID-19,” she said.

And Reading was right. Last year she and her husband both tested positive for COVID-19 but experienced only mild symptoms and recovered quickly.

Like Reid, Reading said that taking a chance on getting COVID-19 again seems less risky than taking a chance on the vaccine. She worries the vaccine could have worse repercussions than the virus.

Adding to the weight of Reading’s uncertainty about the immunization is her struggle with an inflammatory autoimmune condition and chronic Lyme disease. Given her circumstances, she and her doctor have agreed not to do anything that might interfere with her immune system and make it more difficult to restore her health.

“For me, it’s really about the unknown,” Reading said. “Like right now

COVID-19 and the negatives I experienced are known. But from the shot, could they make my illness any worse? So I do have apprehensions.”

‘THE VACCINE AND THE VIRUS HAVE VERY DIFFERENT TRACK RECORDS’

Dr. Colin Greene, director of the Rappahannock Rapidan Health District, is eager to talk to the public about concerns surrounding the vaccine.

“The people who are hesitant to take one or more vaccines — they’re not a uniform group by any means,” he said. “There are dozens of different reasons and points of view as to why someone might or might not want [one].”

Greene conceded that as far as long-term side effects go, “we don’t absolutely know, because we don’t have the experience [with this vaccine].” But, he said, the same thing is true for the virus. “We don’t know what adverse effects that [virus] will cause down the road, and they’re much likely to be worse,” he said.

“What we do know is that the three vaccines that we presently have have demonstrated no serious side effects thus far, after tens of millions of shots given. We know that in most vaccine studies, serious side effects usually show up in the first six weeks after the shot; thus far we haven’t seen any attributable to the vaccine,” Greene said. ➔

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➔ He continued: "Another thing we know is that there are serious concerns about some longer-term effects from COVID infection, and only time will tell just how bad and long-lasting these may be. The vaccine and the virus have very different track records with the available evidence.

"The worst, well-known long-term side effect of the virus is death, which occurs in up to 20 percent of people over 80 who catch it, and up to 1 percent of those in their 60s. The virus has killed over 500,000 Americans, and millions worldwide. The vaccine has caused zero known deaths."

Dr. Greene maintains that it would

The primary condition that might disqualify someone as a vaccine candidate is a history of severe anaphylaxis, or allergic reaction.

be "imprudent" not to get the vaccine. "[What] I would ask people who would rather take their chances with the virus is, this vaccine gives you a tiny little piece of the RNA inside the virus. It gives you just enough of it to make the bumpy proteins on the surface, on the outside, the so-called spike proteins, that allow your body to recognize the virus to get rid of it before it can infect you.

"Whereas if you get sick with the virus, you get the whole length of the viral RNA which invades your cell and makes

billions of new virus cells that go on to invade other cells."

As for people with autoimmune and chronic disorders, Dr. Greene said that while there have been concerns about this interaction with some past vaccines, "We have seen no cases of this problem attributable to the COVID vaccine, after tens of millions of doses (over 100 million worldwide)."

He added that the primary condition that might disqualify someone as a vaccine candidate is a history of severe ana-

phylaxis, or allergic reaction.

And last, Dr. Greene said that the reason the public can trust public health officials is because they are constantly reviewing and reacting to new data. "When something is new, evidence and information pour in pretty quickly in the early days, and guidance is bound to change a bit with everything we learn.

"After a year and millions of cases, we can say with confidence that masks are very effective in decreasing the spread. That statement would have been hard to make confidently in March of 2020, when we only had a few weeks of experience with the virus, and only a relatively few cases."

Courthouse Row

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HOME/LAND TRANSFERS

The following home and land transfers were recorded at the Rappahannock County Circuit Court Clerk's office March 9-15.

Jackson

Michelle A. Baird and David Baird to Michelle A. Baird, 2.00 acres, deed of gift, tax map 32A-1-2C

Rappahannock County

Rhonda C. Almarode and Maxie C. Brown to Sean M. Knick, II and Kelsa M. Knick, husband and wife, 35.69 acres, \$517,000, deed bargain sale, general warranty, tax map 27-48

James K. Humbles and Sharon M. Humbles to Nichola S. Merriam and Elida Merriam, lot 37 and Lot 38, deed of gift, general warranty, tax map 29B-1-38

James K. Humbles and Sharon M. Humbles to Carl Hagen and Grazyna Hagen, new lot 37 Peyton Farm section 1, \$532,000, deed bargain sale, general warranty, tax map 29B-1-37

Town of Washington

William E. Davis trustee of the Raymond L. Gooch Revocable trust to Kimberly M. Welsh and Wesley D. Kerr, 2 parcels, \$616,250, special warranty, tax map 20-A-1-65

Wakefield/Rappahannock County Village of Chester Gap BRME

Michael M. Evans to Bryan O. Ortiz, lots 9 and 10, block 7, plat section E-plat 5-Blue Ridge Mountain Estates, \$290,000, tax map 1C-1-7-9

Wakefield

James E. Yates, III and Rosemary H. Yates, trustees of the James E. Yates, III trust and Rosemary H. Yates and James E. Yates, III, trustees of the Rosemary H. Yates trust to Jericho Cattle Company LLC, 471.76 acres, \$1,600,000.00, deed bargain sale, special warranty, tax map 14-3

Windsor Lodge Farm LLC to Frederick R. Matthews and Elizabeth W. Matthews, husband and wife, parcel 1 containing 50.2294 acres, \$410,000, deed bargain sale, general warranty, tax map 13-85

BUILDING PERMITS

Christopher Maier and Nancy Poe, Flint Hill, partial demolition, \$1,500

George Scott, Woodville, demolition of dwelling, \$55,000

Antonie Hodge, Washington, generator, \$9,500

Phil and Jane Everhardt, Flint Hill, solar array, \$49,842

Michael and Priscilla Goodwin, Amissville, temporary electric pole, \$250

Matt Adams, Amissville, inground pool, \$65,000

Michael and Priscilla Goodwin, Flint Hill, demolition of addition, \$3,000

Rappahannock County Recreational

Facilities Authority Park, Washington, bathroom, \$58,000

Tom Williamson, Castleton, electric on deck, \$4,930

Bradley Schneider, Washington, replace

tankless water heater, \$6,475

Matthew B. and Patricia K. Babin, Sperryville, dwelling, \$450,000

Red Oak Mountain Inv. Prop.

Washington, awnings, \$2,500

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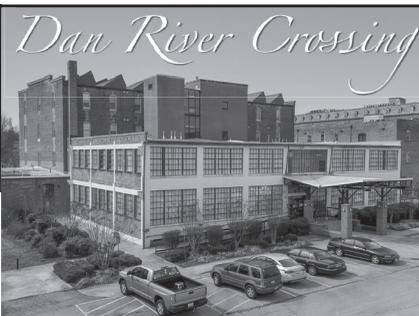
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Some residents in vaccine priority groups still haven't received a call

BY RACHEL NEEDHAM
Rappahannock News Staff

According to the latest numbers from the Virginia Department of Health, 2,768 Rappahannock County residents have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine. And that number could start to rise more rapidly now that the Rappahannock-Rapidan Health District (RRHD), which serves Culpeper, Fauquier, Orange, Madison and Rappahannock counties, has announced that anyone over the age of 16 is eligible to get a shot.

But that doesn't quite mean that everyone in Phase 1 — folks over 65 and essential workers — has received a vaccine. Some county residents are scratching their heads about why they've been left behind.

Rappahannock County resident Louise Goddard, 72, told the News that though she registered with the health district in January, she still hasn't gotten a call from the health district. In addition to being over 65, Goddard has underlying health conditions which she says put her at risk of severe COVID-19 disease.

"I was very confused about who I should be contacting and where I

WHAT IF YOU'RE ELIGIBLE, REGISTERED AND HAVEN'T GOTTEN A CALL?

▶ April Achter, population health coordinator at the Rappahannock Rapidan Health District, says that if you are eligible for prioritization in groups 1a, 1b or 1c, you should call the health district at **540-316-6302** or send an email to askrrhd@vdh.virginia.gov

should be checking," she said, adding that she was beginning to wonder "who you have to 'know' in Rappahannock to get the vaccine."

Frustrated, she asked a friend for advice, and the friend urged her to contact the RRHD.

So on Feb. 1, Goddard made the phone call. When she spoke with an administrator at the health district, Goddard said she was told there was no record of her registration.

The administrator helped Goddard re-enter her information. "She was wonderful," Goddard said. "She told me I was definitely on the list."

And then? Crickets.

Eager to be vaccinated, Goddard

checked the CVS website at 5 a.m. on a Friday morning in March and found a pharmacy in Reston with open vaccine appointments. "So I drove to Reston," she said. "But I just didn't understand — in Rappahannock, it's not like there are millions of people here. Why do we have to drive an hour and a half away?"

Goddard still hasn't been called by the Virginia Department of Health. But April Achter, population health coordinator at the RRHD, said she believes experiences like Goddard's are outliers.

"We've done our best to go through

our list for that age group," Achter said. "Occasionally for whatever reason we couldn't reach someone by phone, sometimes they have a typo in their email address, different things have happened and we're trying to catch all those people. ... Sometimes the invites are going into [people's] spam folders."

Achter said that residents of the RRHD who qualify for a priority group and have not received a call from the health district should call the local health district at 540-316-6302 or send an email to askrrhd@vdh.virginia.gov.

Small businesses now have more time to apply for paycheck protection program, but limited funds remain

BY RACHEL NEEDHAM
Rappahannock News Staff

Last week, President Joe Biden extended the application deadline for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) the day before it was set to expire. The extension gives small businesses hit hard by the pandemic until May 31 to apply for forgivable assistance.

The PPP is a federal emergency loan initiative set up by the Small Business Administration as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act aimed at helping businesses retain their employees. Borrowers can have their loans forgiven if they prove they spent the money on payroll and other eligible expenses.

When the PPP was launched in April of last year, the entire pool — \$349 billion in direct aid — was drained within two weeks. President Donald Trump then signed a second round of \$310 billion into circulation in August. And in January of 2021, another \$284 billion were made available to businesses, with special emphasis on helping very small businesses, including the self-employed, and those that did not have ready access in earlier rounds of the program.

Of the \$284 billion in the third package of PPP funding, about \$66 billion is still available. Some national small business advocates are warning that there may not be enough funding left in the PPP pool to give assistance to all the borrowers who could apply between now and May 31. Politico reported on Tuesday that organizations like the American Institute of CPAs are calling on Congress to spend even more money on relief for small businesses, though it remains to be seen if Congress will respond.

In the past year, at least 79 Rappahannock businesses have received no less than \$4.7 million in federal assistance from the Paycheck Protection Program. But this time around, local

businesses have been slower to apply for loans than they were in the previous two iterations of the program.

Jason Brady, senior vice president at Oak View National Bank in Washington, told the Rappahannock News in March that the stagnation might be caused by some businesses falling short of the eligibility threshold for a 'second draw.' Others, he said, might have recovered from the economic impacts with one loan and therefore simply don't need the aid.

Nevertheless, Brady said he continues to see demand for the program in the community his bank serves. "Oak View continues to take applications for first and second draw PPP customers until the newly established deadline of May 31st," Brady wrote in an email.

\$4.7 million

Amount of Paycheck Protection Program funds received by Rappahannock County businesses in 2020.

"The Small Business Administration has continued to tweak the program, which has been to the benefit of our area's smallest business owners and those who are self employed."

John Asbury, CEO of Atlantic Union Bank, confirmed that his organization will also continue to help businesses file applications for PPP loans.

"While we are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel as vaccines become more widely available, we need to remain vigilant and continue to be economic first responders for small businesses throughout the state," Asbury said. "Many small businesses are still in desperate need of this financial support, and I strongly encourage businesses to take this opportunity."

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All Virginians are eligible to get a vaccine. But will they?

A rise in variants of concern is likely driving an increase in hospitalizations in Virginians aged 50-69

BY RACHEL NEEDHAM
Rappahannock News Staff

As of this week, all Virginians ages 16 and up are eligible to sign up for a vaccine. “We estimate at least three million Virginians will become eligible on Sunday [April 18] and it may take a few weeks to get appointments for everyone,” said Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam. “Working with our partners in local health districts, private pharmacy chains, doctor’s offices and others, I am confident that every adult in Virginia who wants the vaccine can get their shot by the end of May.”

In Virginia more than a quarter of people are fully vaccinated against the virus that causes COVID-19 disease and nearly half of Virginians have received at least one dose. Locally, more than 2,100 Rappahannock residents are fully vaccinated and 3,173 have at least one dose, according to the most recent numbers from the Virginia Department of Health.

Despite the growing number of vaccinated people, the Rappahannock-Rapidan Health District is one

It may take longer for the commonwealth to reach herd immunity than public health officials initially hoped.

of three in the commonwealth that is seeing a surge in COVID-19 cases, according to a report from the University of Virginia Biocomplexity Institute. What’s more, the decline in hospitalization rates seems to have plateaued.

“Virginians aged 50-69 are now experiencing more hospitalizations than they were last summer and fall,” the report said. “The rise in variants of concern is likely driving this increase in hospitalizations.

“Similar patterns appear across the nation. Hospitalizations in Michigan increased dramatically in recent weeks, most notably among those ages 20-49. Pennsylvania lags Michigan but appears to be following suit. While hospitalizations in Virginia currently remain low among those under 50, we may soon follow this pattern too,” the report explained.

It may take longer for the commonwealth to reach herd immunity than public health officials initially hoped. Last Friday Dr. Danny Avula, the state’s vaccine coordinator, said vaccine appointments appeared to

be filling more slowly now than they were when the vaccine campaign first began. “In many communities that have moved into Phase 2 this past week, we’re actually not seeing the demand that [we] expected to,” Avula said. “[We’re] thinking that most of the demand was likely in people who are higher risk because of their worker status or because of their age and underlying conditions.”

Nevertheless, Avula remains hopeful that Virginia is well on its way to vaccinating a critical portion of its population. “I really think it just means there’s less low-hanging fruit than we otherwise thought, and getting more people vaccinated is going to take ... much more work out in communities doing satellite clinics, going into neighborhoods ... for the large part of our population who are not coming to mass vaccination sites.”

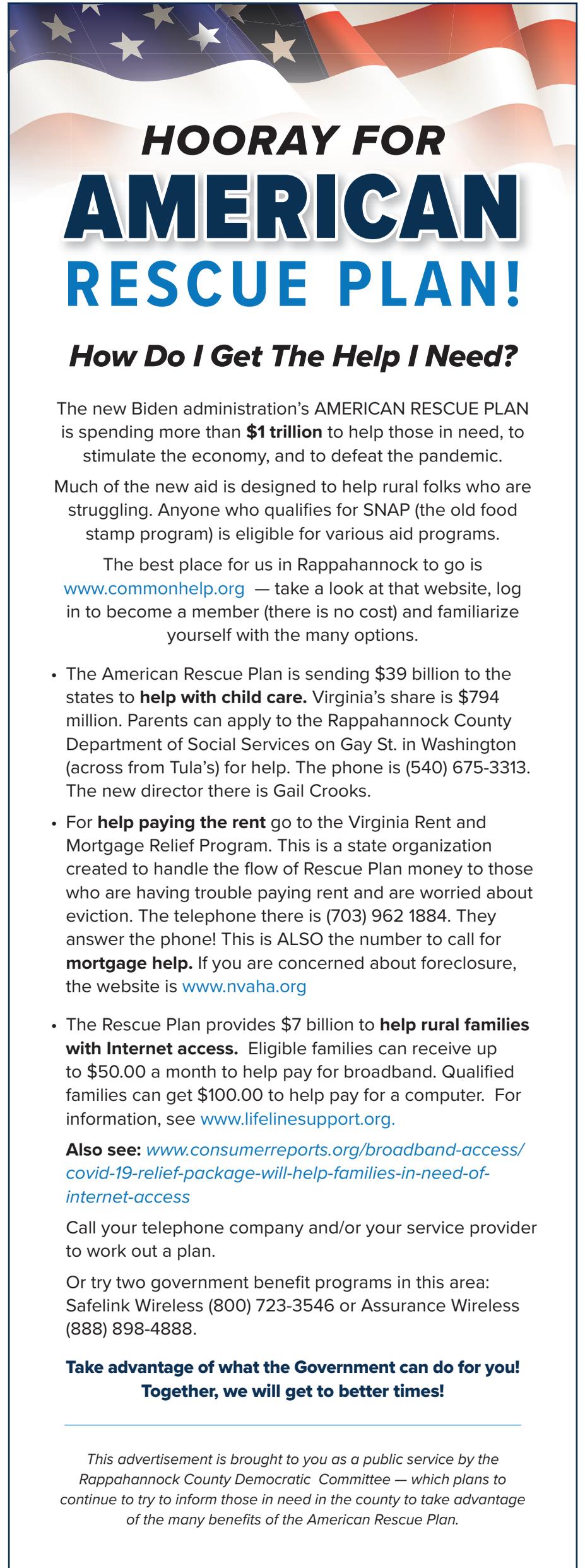
Vaccine hesitancy continues to be of great concern to public health officials. Avula explained that the nationwide pause on administering the Johnson & Johnson jab demonstrates to those who are concerned about vaccine safety that the surveillance of adverse events is working. “The whole reporting of adverse events is exactly for this kind of scenario,” Avula said.

“In fact, you know, I was on a call earlier today where some people were asking, ‘Why are we stopping with these few cases?’ And the answer is that right now vaccine hesitancy or vaccine safety is of the utmost importance, right?”

Before the pause, 184,000 doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine were administered in Virginia alone, the vast majority of which resulted in no adverse events. “What may come of this [pause] is some clarity on subsets of the population who may not be recommended to get the Johnson & Johnson vaccine,” Avula said. “If we can’t confidently have the American public believe and trust in the safety and efficacy of vaccines, that could undermine the entire effort.”

On Tuesday regulators in the European Union stated that they had indeed found a possible correlation between the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine and a rare and severe blood clotting disorder, but went on to say that the benefits of the vaccine far outweigh the risks. Out of the roughly seven million people in the United States that received a Johnson & Johnson vaccine, only eight reported incidents of blood clots.

The decision by the E.U. to resume administering Johnson & Johnson doses may foreshadow what is to come in the U.S., but the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is waiting to issue further guidance until its advisory panel is able to reach a conclusion on whether or not it is safe to do so. The advisory panel is scheduled to meet again on Friday.



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- The Rescue Plan provides \$7 billion to **help rural families with Internet access**. Eligible families can receive up to \$50.00 a month to help pay for broadband. Qualified families can get \$100.00 to help pay for a computer. For information, see www.lifelinesupport.org.

Also see: www.consumerreports.org/broadband-access/covid-19-relief-package-will-help-families-in-need-of-internet-access

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This advertisement is brought to you as a public service by the Rappahannock County Democratic Committee — which plans to continue to try to inform those in need in the county to take advantage of the many benefits of the American Rescue Plan.

Rappahannock leads region in COVID-19 vaccinations — but needs help with the last mile

BY RACHEL NEEDHAM
Rappahannock News Staff

On Monday afternoon Dr. Colin Greene, interim director of the Rappahannock Rapidan Health District, told county officials that Rappahannock is leading the region in the number of COVID-19 vaccinations.

“If you look in Rappahannock County, there [are] only two census tracts in the county. One is roughly 45 percent vaccinated, the other is about 55 percent. So again, as a county, [we’re] doing better than anybody else overall.”

By the numbers, that means nearly 3,500 people have received at least one vaccine dose and more than 2,500 are fully vaccinated. These numbers put Rappahannock County slightly ahead of the statewide average.

But from here on out, state and local health officials may have a more difficult time getting remaining Virginians vaccinated.

“We’re pretty much through the population of people that are enthusiastic about getting a vaccine,” Greene said in his presentation. He noted that the remaining population falls largely into two broad categories: those that are facing impediments to getting a vaccine

and those that are vaccine hesitant.

“The ones that are left are either having trouble getting to a place or having trouble getting a shot or they couldn’t make the internet work ... and the other group is the folks who are just plain less enthusiastic,” he explained. “Some of them are uneasy, maybe a little scared, which is a perfectly natural reaction to

Whitson: “It seems like we still have 3,000 people who might want to get vaccinated but perhaps can’t make the 30-minute drive in one of the directions they’d need to go.”

something new, something unknown. And then there are folks who are more adamant against it, and I think they’re a relatively small number.”

During a press briefing last Friday, Dr. Danny Avula, the state’s vaccine coordinator, said he believes demand for vaccines peaked in the last week of April. “That means that we are pivoting all over Virginia in a different direction,

to make sure that people understand their options [and] make vaccination as convenient as possible,” Avula said.

He added that the Virginia Department of Health will “design our vaccination efforts to be more targeted, more tailored, and more neighborhood-focused” in order to make the experience more convenient and more personal, with the hope that if people can talk through their concerns with their trusted primary care provider, they may be more comfortable taking the vaccine.

One of the biggest challenges, Avula said, might be motivating young adults to get vaccinated. Nearly 80 percent of Rappahannock residents ages 65 and older have gotten a vaccine compared with only 50 percent of those between the ages of 18 and 64.

“The value proposition for young, healthy adults is challenging, right? I mean, they say ‘COVID’s not a big deal, if I get it, I’ll be fine.’ And by and large, they’re right. But this whole idea of herd immunity, that we need to get as many people vaccinated as possible, [is not to] risk another surge of disease,” Avula said. “And that’s why we need to keep vaccinating as many people as possible.”

As demand shifts and the state adapts its strategy for administering doses, Greene said some of the large-scale vaccination clinics in the region, like the one at Germanna Community College in Culpeper, are likely to shut down in the next couple of months. “We’ll be doing a lot of outreach to communities ... in collaboration with county leaders,” Greene said.

Hampton District Supervisor Keir Whitson asked Greene whether public health officials could set up a vaccination site within the county to help alleviate travel challenges.

“It seems like we still have 3,000 people who might want to get vaccinated but perhaps can’t make the 30-minute drive in one of the directions they’d need to go,” Whitson said. “I can tell you I know plenty of people who just aren’t going to make the drive and that concerns me because of our geographic isolation.”

The short answer: Yes. “What we will do is arrange some outreach clinics and it doesn’t have to be just one ... just drop it in a parking lot or a churchyard or something like that, but what we need is for [county government] to tell us where we need to put these,” Greene said.