

# COVID-19 Ask me anything panel event

## Dec. 18, Unanswered questions



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*The following questions were submitted during the live panel event on Friday, Dec. 18, 2020 but panelists were unable to respond due to time constraints. Document updated Monday, Dec. 28, 2020.*

### **Will essential solid waste employees have early access to vaccines once the first/second wave of vaccines get to medical and other higher priority people?**

Most likely. The Oregon Health Authority has established a Vaccine Advisory Committee who will help “co-create” a vaccine distribution plan. This will probably follow Centers for Disease Control guidance which includes essential employees in either Phase 1B or 1C. Healthcare workers are in Phase 1A. The Vaccine Advisory Committee members will be announced later in December. We’ll be watching it closely and advocating for all our essential employees to have access to the vaccine as soon as it’s appropriate. Once we have a timeline, we will share that information.

**How is Metro working around Oregon State suggestion that those who travel in the state need to quarantine?** Metro encourages employees who have travelled out of state to voluntarily quarantine for 14 days and monitor themselves for symptoms. We have not mandated that employees quarantine after travel. Human resources can advise on available leave options by contacting them at [human.resources@oregonmetro.gov](mailto:human.resources@oregonmetro.gov).

**As an essential employee who interacts with the general public on a daily basis, my greatest risk of exposure and transmission comes from reporting to work. I follow Metro protocol, wear a mask, physically distance, don't travel, and only make essential trips out of my house, so what more can I be doing to reduce the risk to myself and the community? I work outside (so fairly low risk), but I can't always enforce or maintain 6 feet between myself and park visitors, nor can I avoid entering confined spaces available to the general public such as portable restrooms while at work.** We thank you for following our policies and taking steps in your personal life to reduce your risks. Anecdotally, it seems that when employees follow these policies it does protect people from the virus. The only other things you can do are to step back if others get too close and keep your portable restroom visits as short as possible!

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**Do you really need to wear a mask when walking your dog, or going on a run, or on a bike ride?** According to the Oregon Health Authority, yes, you must wear a mask at all times when outside your home. We know that some activities have higher/ lower risks than others and certainly taking your dog for a walk is a low-risk activity. It is however not a *no-risk* activity which is why OHA has asked everyone to wear masks at all times.

**I have a high risk household member who has been advised by their physicians that all of us in the home get the vaccine from wherever we can as soon as we can. I am an essential employee and first responder, and the only one who goes outside the home. If my access to a vaccine is prioritized, would that be me alone or also potentially include household members as well? How effective would it be if I received it and not my household?** Each state has the authority to decide the priority order, but the CDC has provided general recommendations. See the question above about the state's authority to designate vaccine order. Each person will be prioritized individually rather than as a household. In addition to essential workers, the CDC has recommended adults ages 75+ in Phase 1B after healthcare professions. Adults aged 65-74 years and ages 16-64 with high-risk medical conditions will be in Phase 1C. See below for an answer to the last question.

**As I understand it, a vaccine reduces effects of illness, but does not remove the possibility of illness. Does it also reduce the ability to spread illness if infected?** Right now, scientists and doctors are unsure if individuals can still spread the disease even if they have received the vaccine. More information will be known in the coming months and we will share updates with you as we hear about them.

**How accurate are the PCR tests at this point?** We do know that there is some risk of false-negatives results when taking a COVID-19 test, but the likelihood depends on a lot of different factors. Check out these resources to learn about PCR and other COVID-19 testing:

- FDA: [COVID-19 Diagnostic Testing](#)
- New England Journal of Medicine: [False Negative Tests for Sars-CoV-2 Infection](#)

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**I know vaccine distribution plans are still be formulated at the state and federal levels, but do we at least know if there will be an employer based distribution system that Metro would be involved in, like with the flu shots? If so, any idea of a timeline?**

State public health officials operate a “push partner program.” This program allows governments and large employers to distribute medical countermeasures (such as vaccines or pills) during a public health emergency. Metro participates in the push partner program. It is unclear how the vaccines will be distributed in this case, especially the Pfizer vaccine that must be kept in ultra-cold freezers.

**When will front line staff get the vaccine?**

Essential employees will probably have a chance to get the vaccine before June.

**If I need to take time off because I don't feel safe being at work with current COVID numbers around the State, can I use sick time instead of vacation for that time off?**

**What paper work do in need to fill out?** Reasons for using sick leave include anytime the employee is affected emotionally, mentally or physically and is not able to perform their job effectively and/or the time is being taken in conjunction with family leave. No paperwork is needed just indicate to your supervisor the need to use sick leave for a COVID-19 related absence. You can also reach out to [human.resources@oregonmetro.gov](mailto:human.resources@oregonmetro.gov) for assistance.

**Will taking the vaccine be a condition of employment?**

*Note, the Dec. 21 version of this document repeated this question providing confusing information.*

We strongly encourage employees to take the vaccine when it becomes available. At this time, Metro has not determined whether or not it will require employees to take the COVID-19 vaccine. We will continue to provide as much information on the vaccine as we get more detailed information.