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MARIN COUNTY

Drive-up vaccination site planned

Health chief says mobile system effective way to give mass doses

By Richard Halstead
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Marin County health officials expect to open a drive-up coronavirus vaccination site as early as Feb. 21.

"We are finalizing an agreement with a large centrally located point

of dispensing as a drive-thru that could accommodate up to 1,500 vaccinations per day," Dr. Matt Willis, the county's public health officer, told the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday.

"Drive-thru sites are emerging as a best practice for mass vaccination," Willis said. "We had one of the first

and most successful drive-thru testing sites at the Marin Center."

The public health department is working with Vivalon, formerly known as Whistlestop, to identify people who might need help getting to the site. Willis said mobile vaccination dispensers will also be used to reach people.

"There are a lot of bright spots emerging but there are continuing challenges," Supervisor Damon Connolly said in reaction to Willis' report.

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A nurse handles a syringe with a dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine at Novato Community Hospital on Jan. 7.

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Vaccine

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Connolly asked if the health agency has considered using mobile technicians to vaccinate high-risk residents in their homes.

Willis said medics might be used to make home visits if necessary, but he said that probably won't happen for at least a couple of weeks.

"Our mobile resources are hitting high-yield settings where there are multiple older residents congregating in the same facility," he said.

On Monday, Willis said

the department will start vaccinating residents 65 and older beginning Feb. 15. Residents with conditions that place them at higher risk of complications will be prioritized among this group.

However, Willis said Kaiser Permanente will continue limiting its vaccinations to people 75 and older at least through the end of the month.

"As we open up to larger numbers of people," Willis told supervisors, "it is going to become increasingly important that we are able to ensure access to those who are most vulnerable."

Willis said his department is reserving vaccine appoint-

ments for members of "equi-ty communities" and providing them with assistance in registering.

In addition, he said, "We have a phone bank where we are able to reach out to individuals in certain categories of vulnerability, including our in-home supportive service workers and others who have been identified through our medical providers as being at higher risk."

Willis said the decision to prioritize people for vaccination based on age is the best strategy for minimizing deaths from the virus.

He said one in seven Marin residents 75 and older who became infected with

the disease died. Among residents 65 to 74, the rate is one in 25.

By comparison, the death rate is one in 250 Marin residents ages 50 to 64, and one in 2,500 residents under 49.

As of Tuesday afternoon, the county had documented 10,419 coronavirus cases since March and 153 deaths.

Willis said prioritizing vaccinations by age is also equitable because death rates from the virus in Marin have virtually mirrored the racial breakdown of the county's population.

"Vaccinating older residents benefits all communities," he said.

Margaret Nyland, a 77-year-old with cognitive issues who lives in senior housing in Mill Valley, wrote in an email Tuesday, "I feel low-income seniors who do not have private insurance are being overlooked by Marin County. The 65 up age group is already being opened up for vaccinations, and I have not even had an appointment made yet!"

Willis also said Tuesday that while Marin remains in the state's purple tier for coronavirus risk, the most serious classification, he expects it to move into the red tier, permitting increased indoor business activity, by the middle of this month.