



Tony Evers

Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

December 03, 2020

Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

Wisconsin is currently experiencing unprecedented growth of the COVID-19 pandemic. 41 out of our 72 counties have critically high levels of COVID-19 disease activity and the state is currently among the worst states in the country in terms of COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people. The disease is straining our hospital systems and leading to staffing shortages in healthcare facilities. A significant contributor to the crisis we are facing is that most of our statewide mitigation efforts have been struck down, enjoined, or are currently the subject of ongoing litigation—including even a public health emergency declaration and order requiring face coverings in public places—and a legislature that has not convened in more than 230 days. Consequently, while other states are experiencing similar surges, Wisconsin uniquely faces substantial barriers to implementing statewide mitigation strategies supported by public health experts and science currently utilized by other states. Given this and the outsized impact COVID-19 is having on our state, it is critical that Wisconsin be prioritized for vaccine allocation in quantities sufficient to vaccinate our healthcare workforce and with additional doses to be able to distribute to high-risk populations.

The COVID-19 vaccine will be a critical component in reducing COVID-related illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths. However, until it is manufactured on a scale large enough to be available for the general public, our healthcare workforce, consisting of 450,000 individuals, will be needed to manage the surge of COVID-19 patients that currently exists and that we expect will continue through the winter.

More than a third of Wisconsin hospitals are reporting critical staffing shortages and providers are struggling to keep pace with the demand for care as the number of COVID-19 patients in hospital beds is roughly double what it was just four weeks ago. The state has established an Alternate Care Facility to accommodate the overflow of low-acuity COVID-19 patients from Wisconsin hospitals and began treating patients in late October as hospitals started reaching capacity.

With the potential for vaccine from Pfizer by the end of the calendar year and Moderna not long after, states with a high burden of COVID-19 cases such as Wisconsin should be prioritized with the first vaccine shipments and in quantities large enough to vaccinate all 450,000 members of our healthcare workforce and to begin vaccinating Wisconsinites who are high-risk. By administering vaccine to our frontline healthcare

workers and thus protecting them from COVID-19 infection, we will relieve some of the existing staffing pressures within our hospitals and nursing homes and enable them to provide direct care to COVID-19 patients.

After prioritizing healthcare workers, delivery of COVID-19 vaccine to high-risk populations will be our next priority. It is imperative that states receive quantities that are at least commensurate with their proportion of the population. Throughout the pandemic, Wisconsin has seen delayed shipments, lack of communication, and inadequate fulfillment of requests we have made of the federal government from testing to PPE. As vaccine distribution gets underway, our state cannot afford to have this pattern of failed promises repeat.

I appreciate that the first distribution decisions will need to be made quickly and urge you to focus on those states currently experiencing the brunt of this virus. I appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Evers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tony" being more prominent than the last name "Evers".

Tony Evers
Governor

Cc: Wisconsin Congressional Delegation