

NM part of Pfizer's pilot program for COVID-19 vaccine

Written by By Matthew Reichbach NM Political Report
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While widespread distribution is still months away, pharmaceutical giant Pfizer announced that New Mexico would be one of four states to participate in a pilot delivery program for the distribution of its COVID-19 vaccine, though this does not mean the state will receive doses of the vaccine before other areas.

Pfizer announced earlier this month that a preliminary analysis found that the vaccine was over 90 percent effective in preventing illness.

New Mexico—along with Rhode Island, Texas and Tennessee—will take part in the pilot program, which will not include any early distribution of the vaccine.

“The four states included in this pilot program will not receive vaccine doses earlier than other states by virtue of this pilot, nor will they receive any differential consideration,” Pfizer said in its announcement.

The pilot program is designed to “help us prepare for broader vaccine deployment in the near future, subject to authorization or approval, as we work to address this urgent public health need,” according to Pfizer Biopharmaceuticals Pfizer Pivotal Group President Angela Hwang. “We are hopeful that results from this vaccine delivery pilot will serve as the model for other U.S. states and international governments, as they prepare to implement effective COVID-19 vaccine programs.”

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The state Department of Health did not respond to questions about what the pilot program would entail. The state's preliminary COVID-19 vaccination plan does address the need for ultra-cold storage, and acknowledged that it will be difficult for small and rural providers. The plan also expressed concern about the ability to procure supplies like dry ice to keep the temperatures cold and how to monitor temperatures once containers are provided to the state.

A major issue with the distribution is over the requirements for storing the vaccine. Pfizer's vaccine must be kept at minus 70 degrees Celsius, or minus 94 degrees Fahrenheit.

CBS News outlined some logistical challenges that the company would need to address. The storage provided by Pfizer not only would need to be kept at extremely cold temperatures, they could only be opened twice a day for less than three minutes to keep the vaccine samples viable. And ultra-cold freezers that could keep the samples viable for up to six months are expensive and increasingly difficult to find.

The vaccine also requires two separate doses, three weeks apart.

Pfizer said it has been working with the federal government both through Operation Warp Speed, which the Trump administration announced to speed the process of developing a vaccine for COVID-19, and the CDC for approval of the vaccine.

Pfizer aims to have 300 million doses of a vaccine ready in 2021, the first 100 million of which will go to the United States, through an agreement between Pfizer and the U.S. government.

Pfizer's vaccine is not the only one with promising results from a preliminary analysis. Moderna announced earlier this week that its vaccine was nearly 95 percent effective in preventing illness.

Moderna's vaccine also must be kept at cold temperatures, but not as cold as Pfizer's.

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