

5 GUIDING PRINCIPLES: COVID-19 VACCINE DISTRIBUTION AND ADMINISTRATION

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December 10, 2020: Today the Hematology/Oncology Pharmacy Association (HOPA) released a statement on the distribution and administration of the COVID-19 vaccine. The organization says a successful COVID-19 vaccine distribution must prioritize equity and safety and include more studies on its effects on specific populations, including people with cancer. And, they add, that utilizing specialty pharmacists and being prepared for challenging logistics will lead to better vaccine administration.

1. Equity

Prioritization of vaccine allocation should focus on maximizing benefit and mitigating health inequities. Initial vaccine distribution should prioritize equitable distribution for the most critically vulnerable populations, health care personnel, and essential workers. In particular the vaccine should prioritize individuals with underlying health conditions, specifically cancer and cancer survivors, are already at higher risk for COVID-19 complications and severity of illness; and people of color who have faced longstanding disparities in health, including in cancer care, and bear a disproportionate burden of the virus.

2. Safety

Administration of the vaccine should prioritize the safety of providers. Strategies that address the distribution and administration of the vaccine(s) must ensure that providers and logistics personnel are working under safe conditions. The vaccination workforce, which includes pharmacists, must be well prepared for distribution, including implementing and following proper safety procedures, and ensuring access to sufficient personal protective equipment.

3. Specific Populations

Vaccine development and distribution among specialty populations, including cancer patients and cancer survivors, must be backed by data on safety and efficacy. Approximately 40 COVID vaccine candidates are in clinical trials, but very few are being tested to understand the potential adverse effects on individuals living with cancer. Further data and research is necessary to understand any potential risks of the vaccine and to support patient education. Cancer healthcare professionals such as oncology pharmacists, will play a crucial role in advocating and educating patients on vaccine use and safety.

4. Speciality Pharmacists

Engage hematology/oncology pharmacists who care for priority cancer populations. Facilitating the vaccination among priority populations such as cancer patients, will require collaborative efforts amongst the health care team. Many patients with cancer have a hematology and oncology specialized pharmacist on their provider team who provides hands-on patient centered care; oncology pharmacists are active team members and excellent resources for consultation and patient education for vaccination, including appropriateness and timing of the vaccination.

5. Logistics

Identify and address logistical challenges in vaccine administration. At least two of the leading COVID-19 vaccine candidates face additional administration challenges, including an uninterrupted cold chain, and the coordination of a second dose with differing intervals. To ensure vaccine effectiveness, logistical challenges that might affect uptake -- including tracking adverse drug reactions, monitoring uptake of the second dose for vaccines that need it, and ensuring access to temperature-controlled storage -- must be identified, and where possible, potential solutions should be suggested, and pharmacies consulted.



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