

West Virginia has experienced landmark days in the pandemic response this past week as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) granted Emergency Use Authorization for a COVID-19 vaccine. As we write this, thousands of COVID-19 vaccine doses are being loaded and shipped to states across our nation, including ours. As healthcare and public health leaders in the Mountain State, we are breathing sighs of relief because we are confident that this vaccine is safe, effective, and is our best hope for ending the current pandemic.

You might be wondering whether you should trust a COVID-19 vaccine. The COVID-19 vaccine development process has been the fastest we have seen to date because the entire medical, scientific, and public health communities building upon prior research technology mobilized like never before to end this pandemic. Clinical trials with tens of thousands of people showed that vaccination is highly effective in preventing COVID-19 and caused no serious adverse effects. We watched Thursday as the FDA's advisory committee livestreamed their discussion of the evidence leading to their decision to authorize its use. We tuned in again on Friday and Saturday as the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) met to review the data and provide recommendations for use of the vaccine. These expert committees agree that this vaccine has met rigorous, scientific standards of safety and quality, and should be made available for use by the public.

We want to be clear: We will get vaccinated as soon as it is our turn, and we will recommend it as soon as possible to our family members and patients based on guidance from the ACIP. We trust the process, and we think you should, too.

We have wept with the families we care for and serve, watching them struggle with severe illness and even death. Some have only had the opportunity to say final goodbyes on the phone. These images and memories will stay with us for our lifetimes. But today we are hopeful, because the COVID-19 vaccine can help end this pandemic, protect the health and wellbeing of our communities, and get our economy moving again.

We will each personally receive the COVID-19 vaccine as soon it becomes available to us. We will do this because getting vaccinated not only protects us, but the people around us—particularly those at risk of severe COVID-19 illness. When large numbers of people in a community are vaccinated, fewer people get sick, saving lives, ensuring that the healthcare system can continue to meet the needs of those it is intended to serve, and getting us back to normal lives as soon as possible.

Each of us must continue to do our part to prevent the spread of the virus. Stopping a pandemic requires using all the public health tools we have available, and vaccination is likely our strongest tool yet. As medical and public health experts, we take our duty to protect our patients

and our communities very seriously. We will continue to do our part to end the spread of COVID-19 by getting vaccinated ourselves and encouraging our patients, friends, and neighbors to do the same when the vaccine is available to them.

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