

Advisory Committee on COVID-19 Vaccination Ethics FAQ

Prioritizing COVID-19 Vaccine in North Dakota

1. What is the purpose of the North Dakota Advisory Committee on COVID-19 Vaccination Ethics?

The North Dakota Advisory Committee on COVID-19 Vaccination Ethics has been tasked with providing recommendations to the State of North Dakota and healthcare providers for prioritizing and allocating doses of vaccine as they arrive in the state.

2. Who is on the North Dakota Advisory Committee on COVID-19 Vaccination Ethics?

The committee is comprised of five voting members: a physician, an ethicist, a local public health representative, a representative of the Department of Human Services and a representative of the Department of Health. The committee is facilitated by a retired medical epidemiologist who is acting as an advisor to the NDDoH Division of Immunization.

3. How is the North Dakota Advisory Committee on COVID-19 Vaccination Ethics different from the federal Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP)?

The [ACIP](#) makes recommendations to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for priority groups for COVID-19 vaccination. These are large priority groups and need to be prioritized further at the state level. That is why North Dakota created its own committee. Ultimately, it is up to states to determine the prioritization and allocation of COVID-19 vaccine.

4. Has the CDC or ACIP provided any guidance for the North Dakota Advisory Committee on COVID-19 Vaccination Ethics to base their decisions on?

The ACIP has provided recommendations which prioritizes broad categories of individuals. These federal guidelines have been developed through the contributions of both government and non-government experts. The categories in Phase 1 represent those persons likely to be vaccinated before vaccine becomes widely available to everyone. Currently, the three categories within Phase 1 are:

- a. Phase 1-A: Health care workers and long-term care residents
- b. Phase 1-B: Persons 75 and older and frontline essential workers
- c. Phase 1-C: Persons age 65-74, persons ages 16-64 with high-risk medical conditions, and other essential workers

5. What principles does the North Dakota Advisory Committee on COVID-19 Vaccination Ethics follow?

The committee unanimously voted to be guided by a set of ethical principles laid out by the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine in a document called [Framework for Equitable Allocation of COVID-19 Vaccination](#). The ethical principles can be summarized as follows:

- a. Achieving maximum societal benefit by optimally protecting health and socioeconomic well-being;
- b. Ensuring that each human life is treated with equal dignity, worth and value;
- c. Mitigating the disparities in disease impact on different populations;
- d. Ensuring fairness and impartiality;
- e. Acting transparently; and,
- f. Making decisions based on the best available evidence.

6. What criteria does the Advisory Committee on COVID-19 Vaccination Ethics use to prioritize groups for vaccinators?

The committee considers the following in determining priority:

- Risk and intensity of exposure to COVID-19;
- Likelihood of adverse outcome if infected with COVID-19; and,
- Critical role in ensuring survival of infected patients and ensuring the integrity of community function.

In considering risk, many factors may fall under the above categories including living in a congregate setting, known impact of the epidemic on a population, provision of direct or indirect patient care especially to persons at increased risk or know to have COVID-19, having underlying health conditions or being age 65 or older. Separation of one group from another is often determined not just by the presence of a risk factor but by the number of factors each group has.

The committee recognizes that there is no one "right" answer, but some answers are better than others. Not all persons can be highest priority for vaccination.

7. Why did the North Dakota Advisory Committee on COVID-19 Vaccination Ethics need to determine priority groups?

The priority groups provided by CDC are too large for the number of doses being allocated to the state, so further prioritization is needed.

8. Does the NDDoH have to follow recommendations from the CDC, ACIP or North Dakota Advisory Committee on COVID-19 Vaccination Ethics?

No. It is ultimately up to the State of North Dakota to determine priority groups for vaccination.

9. Do vaccinators have to follow the recommendations of the North Dakota Advisory Committee on COVID-19 Vaccination Ethics?

Yes, however, vaccinators should use their best judgement to determine if patients meet the criteria outlined by the committee. Tribes have sovereignty and may determine their own priorities for vaccination as long as they are “in the spirit of ACIP recommendations.”

10. Where can I find recommendations from the North Dakota Advisory Committee on COVID-19 Vaccination Ethics?

Priority groups are posted on the NDDoH [website](#).

11. Can I attend the North Dakota Advisory Committee on COVID-19 Vaccination Ethics meeting?

Committee meetings are open to the public and published on the North Dakota Secretary of State public meeting [website](#). Contact information is provided at each meeting for persons not on the committee or in the NDDoH Division of Immunization to provide feedback. Advocates representing a variety of groups have been present during the meetings and provided comment before and after the meetings.