

Harris County to create COVID-19 vaccine wait list to handle massive demand

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State Representative Harold Dutton receives his second dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine Jan. 23, 2021, in Houston. Harris County is creating a vaccination wait list to address the high demand for the vaccine.

Photo: Steve Gonzales, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer

Harris County on Tuesday will launch a COVID-19 vaccine wait list to ensure shots are fairly administered among eligible residents.

Instead of the first-come, first-served approach used by other distributors, including the city of Houston, the county's system will randomly choose recipients for appointments. Older residents will be made a priority, Harris County Public Health said.

“Let me put it bluntly: Getting the COVID-19 vaccine shouldn't be like the ‘Hunger Games,’” County Judge Lina Hidalgo said. “It shouldn't be about who can hit refresh on a browser the fastest.”

Only people who meet the criteria for phases 1A — first responders and health care workers — and 1B — residents at least 65 years old or those with certain medical conditions — will receive appointments.

Registration will be available at readyharris.org; residents also can call (832) 927-8787 to sign up. Operators are available in English, Spanish and Vietnamese. All Texans are eligible.

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The health department said its distribution plan complies with state guidelines. Dallas County backtracked on a plan to focus vaccination efforts in certain low-income ZIP codes after the state threatened to withhold supply of the vaccine.

Harris County has administered more than 27,000 vaccine doses to date, less than the capacity of Minute Maid Park. Hidalgo said the county has received about 9,000 doses of the Moderna vaccine each week.

People who are not eligible for the 1A or 1B categories still can sign up. Vaccines may not be available for most residents, however, until May or June.

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