We begin 2021 with more hope than we have felt in 10 months. Three weeks ago, the first doses of the long-awaited COVID-19 vaccine went into the arms of Quad-City healthcare workers. In the days since, more medical professionals have started their two-dose regimes.

Many here at the Rock Island County Health Department rolled up our sleeves last week while preparing our staff to go out into the community to administer the vaccine. I got mine. My arm was a little sore, but I did not give it much thought the next day.

We understand that all residents are eager for their turn and that information has been frustratingly difficult to obtain – even for those of us helping lead the effort locally. We all must remember that this is the largest public health response in modern history and will be completed in phases. The oldest among us remember the anticipation and relief when the polio vaccines began in the late 1950s. Just like now, not everyone who wanted the vaccine could get it right away. But, in time, polio vaccines became so routine that the disease has been eliminated in the Western Hemisphere.

Please be patient. Your turn will come.

RICHD’s first mass vaccination clinic **for heathcare workers only** is 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Jan. 12 (or until limited vaccine supply runs out) at the Greater Quad-City Auto Auction, 4015 78th Ave, Milan. Only healthcare workers with appropriate identification are eligible to receive the vaccine at this clinic. We expect to have clinics at the auto auction most Tuesdays until every resident has an opportunity to take the vaccine through this phased approach. Healthcare workers are in Phase 1A, which we will take us through January and into February.

As more vaccines come into our community and we move into Phase 1B, Rock Island County vaccination efforts will expand to pharmacies, weekend vaccination clinic hours at Community Health Care, and, eventually, private medical practices.

Based on U.S. Census, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce data and our Community Health Assessment, we know that more than 50 percent of Rock Island County residents fall into Phases 1A (about 8,000 people) and 1B (about 65,000 people). This will take months; however, the governor broadly outlined a plan that included National Guard supporting larger vaccination clinics. This was good news to us at the local level, and we hope to share more news soon.

We all know that COVID-19 has hit long-term-care facilities particularly hard. CVS and Walgreens through a partnership with the federal government will vaccinate residents and staff in those facilities. This effort will run alongside public health’s clinics in Phase 1A. Because the health department is not part of the federal pharmacy partnership, we do not have information about the program to share. Vaccines for long-term-care facilities are coming directly from the federal government. For those with loved ones in these facilities, we urge you to watch for information coming from facility administration.

After Phase 1A is complete, we can move into Phase 1B. These groups include:

* Residents 65 and older (different from federal recommendation of age 75 and older)
* Frontline essential workers, defined by IDPH as those workers who are essential for the functioning of society

The state listed several groups as being in Phase 1B, but officials said this is not an exhaustive list:

* First responders: Fire, law enforcement, 911 workers, security personnel, school officers
* Education: Teachers, principals, student support, student aides, day care worker
* Food and agriculture: Processing, plants, veterinary health, livestock services, animal care
* Manufacturing: Industrial production of goods for distribution to retail, wholesale or other manufacturers
* Corrections workers and inmates: Jail officers, juvenile facility staff, workers providing in-person support, inmates
* U.S. Postal Service workers
* Public transit workers: Flight crews, bus drivers, train conductors, taxi drivers, para-transit drivers, in-person support, ride-sharing services
* Grocery store workers: Baggers, cashiers, stockers, pickup, customer service
* Shelters and day care staff: Homeless shelter, women’s shelter, adult day/drop-in program, sheltered workshop, psycho-social rehab

IDPH has yet to set groups beyond Phases 1A and 1B. We will tell you when it does, but we expect Phase 1C include food service and other frontline workers. We certainly understand that the people whose professions are not listed above are eager to find it when it is their turn.

As we have said throughout the pandemic, the health department is working from its long-standing pandemic response plans; however, with any emergency response, execution of the plan will not go as smoothly as it looks on paper. Every staff member at every public health department in the country is working on your behalf to get you vaccinated as quickly as possible. It will take time. It will take patience.

We offer this information – even though it is incomplete – to help ease your mind, to give you hope and to share that public health has a plan for you. Please keep watching through our media partners, our social media page, our website and togetherqc.com. Please stay engaged and watch for your turn. It will come.