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Sen. Smith writes about the progress of Wisconsin's COVID-19 vaccine rollout and shares information from the Department of Health Services on vaccine distribution.

MADISON - It's been so long since most of us have been in a crowd, but I'm sure we're all eager for the chance to once again go to a theater, shake hands when meeting someone or dine at our favorite restaurant. My wife and I miss heading down to our local restaurant, which would normally be packed with so many of our neighbors and friends on a Friday night.

The road to returning to our normal routines may seem far off, but it doesn't have to be. We've gained more information and collected tools to help us in our COVID-19 recovery. We learned to slow the spread by staying home, social distancing and wearing masks. Now we have the COVID-19 vaccine, another tool at our disposal in our fight against COVID-19. We can thank scientists, researchers and frontline workers for allowing us to start visualizing an end to this pandemic.

Governor Tony Evers continues to work with the federal government and private partners to get more Wisconsinites vaccinated as quickly as possible. It's important to know the vaccine roll-out will take time while the vaccine supply increases. This explains why certain populations, like healthcare workers or elderly residents, are prioritized before the general public. While we wait patiently, it's up to us to remain vigilant and follow safety precautions to keep our communities safe.

On December 14th, Wisconsin received its first shipment of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. Wisconsin began receiving the Moderna vaccine one week later. Since then, Wisconsin has vaccinated groups most vulnerable to infection. Phase 1A includes frontline medical personnel and residents of the 57,000 nursing homes and 147,000 long term care facilities in Wisconsin. Phase 1B includes police and fire personnel. Beginning Monday, January 25 t h Wisconsin began vaccinating more residents aged 65 and older. The State Disaster Medical Advisory Committee is currently making recommendations for other priority populations as vaccine production and distribution continues.

The federal government is responsible for allocating vaccines to each state; the number of vaccines allocated to each state differs depending on the state's population. In recent weeks, Governor Evers publicly requested more vaccines be sent to Wisconsin.

The Department of Health Services provides a transparent overview of our state's vaccine distribution process. The agency continues to update the number of vaccines Wisconsin has allocated, ordered, shipped and administered throughout the state.

The pandemic has been challenging for individuals in many ways, but perhaps the biggest hardship has been our inability to spend time with our family. My wife's parents are over 90 years old and still do quite well in their own home. They've kept up with technology, but we help them when needed. Last Wednesday, they called my wife to say they received a message from their healthcare provider informing them they were eligible for a vaccine. My wife helped her parents make an appointment for the very next morning. She picked them up at 6:30 the next day and they received their first dose.



Like so many others, our parents were anxiously wondering how they'd know when they could get vaccinated. Once more vaccine doses become available, more information will be released to explain where someone can get vaccinated among the 1,200 eligible vaccinators in Wisconsin. These vaccinators include healthcare providers, pharmacies, local health departments, places of employment, and mass vaccination clinics.

There isn't a conspiracy to block or delay the release of the vaccine. Legislators cannot produce more vaccine doses or expedite the process just by demanding it to happen.

A public health crisis shouldn't be used to advance political agendas; we've seen this happen too much during the past year and we're seeing it play out again with the vaccine roll-out. Don't let legislative leaders play the blame game and pretend they have the answers to get you vaccinated. We won't get anywhere if these leaders are more focused on making headlines with disingenuous proposals or raising doubts about the vaccine itself.

While more Wisconsinites get vaccinated, remember to continue following public health precautions to do your part to stop the spread. Our collective efforts will help us overcome the pandemic sooner and safer.