

Hope and frustration as US steps up pharmacy vaccinations

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For some, it represents the chance to be reunited with grandchildren. For others, the first step on the long journey back to normal, knowing they'll soon be protected against COVID-19.

Retail pharmacies across the United States on Friday began administering a million [vaccine doses](#) sent to them by the government of President Joe Biden, the latest sign the country's immunization campaign is gathering pace.

On a bitterly cold day in Bethesda, just outside the capital Washington, a steady stream of elderly people arrived for their first dose of Moderna's two-shot course at their local CVS pharmacy.

"This is wonderful, it's really convenient," said Ted Pochter, 76.

His wife, Liz Pochter, added their daughter had signed them up online the day before at 6:30 am.

"I was trying to get on my phone and it was already full, but she was on the computer and did it," said the 67-year-old who works for the National Gallery

of Art.

"It did hurt a little bit," she said of the jab, laughing.

Some 6,500 drugstores and supermarket pharmacies have started administering their first doses under a federal partnership, and the program is set to expand to 40,000 outlets.

It's seen as a way to reduce the burden on state health departments while making it more convenient for people already used to getting their flu shots at places like CVS, Rite Aid, and Walgreens.

After a fitful start, the US vaccination rate is ticking up, and 35.8 million people have now had at least one dose, about 10 percent of the population.

Help from kids

Like the Pochters, Tahmineh Mirmirani needed her son's assistance to get on the web and book her appointment early on Thursday.

Now, the 81-year-old, who once worked as a journalist in her native Iran, said she looks forward to soon seeing her grandchildren.

Lee, a 72-year-old retiree who gave only his first name, said he was happy to get his vaccine after trying for weeks. "We've registered everywhere we can, in the county and in the state."

But his relief was dampened by the fact that his wife, who accompanied him, couldn't get her vaccine Friday and the couple would have to return Monday for her appointment.

"We have a graduating grandchild, who's a graduating senior. And we would like to be able to go to the graduation," he said, if it does take place.

"We're hoping that summer brings better results

with COVID and with the vaccine. I hope that they're able to vaccinate a lot of people between now and then."

Frustrations

Many others have found navigating the vaccination sign-up system frustrating.

Faye Elkins, 74, said she spent Thursday lining up to get a vaccination at a local high school, only to be told they were available only for over-75s, not over-65s, as advertised.

"We were turned away, along with many other people, some of whom waited in line for up to three hours in the cold," she said.

Elkins and her husband Jim Barnett said they hadn't managed to get an appointment at CVS despite their best efforts, but were there to try their luck in case someone canceled.

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