



The Navajo Nation  
Office of the President and Vice President

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**FDA advisory committee recommends authorization of Pfizer vaccine for COVID-19, public health care experts to provide important updates during virtual town hall**

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – On Thursday, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s advisory committee recommended the authorization of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for COVID-19, which would allow for the distribution of the vaccine based on the Centers for Disease Control’s phased distribution plan that calls for health care workers and those living in long-term assisted living facilities to receive the vaccine first on a volunteer basis. Final FDA approval is pending.

Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer will be joined by Navajo Department of Health Executive Director Dr. Jill Jim, Chief Medical Officer for Navajo Area Indian Health Service Dr. Loretta Christensen, Dr. Laura Hammitt with John Hopkins University, and other public health experts to provide important updates about the Pfizer vaccine, during a live virtual town hall on Thursday, Dec. 10 at 6:00 p.m. (MST) on the Nez-Lizer Facebook page and later aired on local radio stations in English and Navajo.

Upon final approval by the FDA, the Navajo Area IHS will initially receive 3,900 doses of the Pfizer vaccine early next week, which will be distributed to each of its service units based on user population percentage. The Navajo Nation opted to have the Navajo Area IHS oversee the distribution of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, with the exception of the Utah Navajo Health System, which opted to work with the state of Utah for distribution. Moderna is also seeking approval from the FDA for its COVID-19 vaccine, which has shown 94.5-percent effectiveness. Both COVID-19 vaccines, Pfizer and Moderna, will require two separate doses to be administered at two different times.

Pfizer has reported that its vaccine is 95-percent effective against COVID-19 with no serious safety concerns. Earlier this year, the Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board, the National Indian Health Service IRB, and the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health IRB approved the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine clinical trial. As of Dec. 8, over 43,000 people have volunteered for the Pfizer vaccine trials worldwide, including members of the Navajo Nation and the White Mountain Apache Tribe.

“We are relying on the recommendations of the CDC, regarding the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines. The CDC recommends that the first doses of the vaccines be administered to health care workers and those living in long-term assisted living facilities, due to higher risks of COVID-19 exposure. It’s also important to understand that the vaccines will be distributed across the

country, so it will take time before it can be made widely available to the general public. We have many of our Navajo people who live off of the Navajo Nation, and we want them to be made aware of this information as well. We have had many of our own Navajo citizens voluntarily participate in the vaccine trials, and I have not received reports of any major issues. We will continue working closely with our public health experts, and to rely of guidance from the Centers for Disease Control, to provide more information, facts, and transparency and also to provide answers to questions throughout this process,” said President Nez.

The online town hall will be held on Thursday, Dec. 10 at 6:00 p.m. (MST) on the Nez-Lizer Facebook page and later aired on local radio stations in English and Navajo.

“Public engagement is very important throughout the COVID-19 vaccine distribution process. We encourage our Navajo people, where ever they reside, to learn about the vaccines and help inform the elders as well. This is the light at the end of the tunnel, but we have to remain diligent and dedicated to protecting ourselves and our loved ones as the numbers of COVID-19 cases remain high on the Navajo Nation and in the southwest region. Please continue to pray for everyone, especially for those on the frontlines,” said Vice President Lizer.

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