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Date: January 12, 2021 - For Immediate Release
Press Release

Hillsboro, TX – The COVID-19 vaccine distribution continues to roll out across the State of Texas. However, questions remain about the access and availability to the virus, especially in rural areas. Currently, the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) has only cleared persons in category 1A and 1B for eligibility to receive the vaccine.

“First, let me be clear, the County Government is not involved in the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine. We also have no say in who can receive the vaccine. DSHS establishes all those rules and works directly with service providers who have completed their authorization process to become a distribution point. The latest information I have lists the Brookshire’s pharmacies in Hillsboro and Whitney, American Star Pharmacy inside Hill Regional Hospital, and Eubank Drug in Whitney as approved distributors of the vaccine in Hill County. Eight other pharmacies are in different stages of receiving authorization to provide the vaccine within the County,” said Hill County Judge Justin Lewis. “These providers are required to follow the state guidelines for distribution and can only give vaccines to individuals in category 1A or 1B as established by DSHS,” continued Lewis. “If you are qualified to receive the vaccine based on the State’s criteria, you should contact your primary care physician or one of the private pharmacies receiving doses of the vaccine to determine when you could be scheduled for inoculation,” stated Lewis.

The DSHS website provides the following information on people who are eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine as part of the 1A group:

First Tier

- Paid and unpaid workers in hospital settings working directly with patients who are positive or at high risk for COVID-19. Such as but not limited to:
 - o Physicians, nurses, respiratory therapists and other support staff (custodial staff, etc.)
 - o Additional clinical staff providing supporting laboratory, pharmacy, diagnostic and/or rehabilitation services
 - o Others having direct contact with patients or infectious materials
- Long-term care staff working directly with vulnerable residents. Includes:
 - o Direct care providers at nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and state supported living centers
 - o Physicians, nurses, personal care assistants, custodial, food service staff
- EMS providers who engage in 9-1-1 emergency services like pre-hospital care and transport
- Home health care workers, including hospice care, who directly interface with vulnerable and high-risk patients
- Residents of long-term care facilities

Second Tier

- Staff in outpatient care settings who interact with symptomatic patients. Such as but not limited to:
 - o Physicians, nurses, and other support staff (custodial staff, etc.)
 - o Clinical staff providing diagnostic, laboratory, and/or rehabilitation services
 - o Non 9-1-1 transport for routine care
 - o Healthcare workers in corrections and detention facilities

- Direct care staff in freestanding emergency medical care facilities and urgent care clinics
- Community pharmacy staff who may provide direct services to clients, including vaccination or testing for individuals who may have COVID
- Public health and emergency response staff directly involved in administration of COVID testing and vaccinations
- Last responders who provide mortuary or death services to decedents with COVID-19. Includes:
 - Embalmers and funeral home workers who have direct contact with decedents
 - Medical examiners and other medical certifiers who have direct contact with decedents
- School nurses who provide health care to students and teachers.

People who meet eligibility requirements as part of the 1B category are as follows:

- People 65 years of age and older
- People 16 years of age and older with at least one chronic medical condition that puts them at increased risk for severe illness from the virus that causes COVID-19, such as but not limited to:
 - Cancer
 - Chronic kidney disease
 - COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
 - Heart conditions, such as heart failure, coronary artery disease or cardiomyopathies
 - Solid organ transplantation
 - Obesity and severe obesity (body mass index of 30 kg/m² or higher)
 - Pregnancy
 - Sickle cell disease
 - Type 2 diabetes mellitus

For additional information on the process and status of the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine in Texas, please visit <https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/immunize/vaccine.aspx>

“As the focus in the fight against COVID-19 has shifted to the distribution of the vaccines, we are having some challenges with receiving accurate information as to the number of active cases in our area. The testing center is continuing to operate at the Dr. John Erwin Annex, but I know there has been a lag in some people receiving results from those tests. We are working with the contractor managing the testing center to resolve that situation. In addition I have scheduled a call with DSHS for this Thursday to discuss what’s happening with our numbers and how cases are currently being tracked,” said Lewis. “I will do my best to provide everyone with updated numbers on our current caseload following this call. As I’ve said before, I want to be as transparent as possible, but I also want to provide accurate information, and, right now, I just don’t have information to share that would truly help in our understanding of the situation,” continued Lewis. “So, for now, please continue to wash your hands, wear your mask and socially distance. Let’s do all we can to support our frontline workers and keep each other safe,” finished Lewis.

For information on the current State of Texas response to COVID-19, please visit <https://gov.texas.gov>. In addition to checking with local news outlets on the requirements in a specific region, please review information on the guidelines to follow for business operations and recreational activities at <https://open.texas.gov/>

Information on the spread of the Coronavirus across Texas is available at the DSHS dashboard website, <https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/> To monitor updates from Hill County, the most current information will be provided on the Hill County Emergency Management Facebook Page and *KHBR 1560 AM Radio* and the *Hillsboro Reporter*.

