

**UAMS News Bureau**

Office of Communications & Marketing  
4301 West Markham # 890  
Little Rock, AR 72205-7199

[uamshealth.com/news](http://uamshealth.com/news)



**News Release**

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**Media Contacts:**

Leslie W. Taylor, 501-686-8998

Wireless phone: 501-951-7260

[leslie@uams.edu](mailto:leslie@uams.edu)

Yavonda Chase, 501-686-8994

Wireless phone: 501-416-0354

[yavonda@uams.edu](mailto:yavonda@uams.edu)

## **COVID-19 Vaccine Available to UAMS Employees**

LITTLE ROCK — The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) received its first allocation of 2,000 COVID-19 vaccinations from the Arkansas Department of Health today and began administering the first vaccines to critical health care employees.

Employees were prioritized based on potential exposure and risk of transmitting the virus, with employees working in intensive care units, the Emergency Department, COVID testing sites and units with COVID-positive patients being given the first opportunity to receive the vaccine. This includes physicians, nurses, therapists and other health care workers along with transport, registration, environment services and nutrition services employees. Other health care workers and students who work directly with patients will be offered the vaccine as additional quantities become available.

“We have been anxiously awaiting an effective vaccine for many months,” said UAMS Chancellor Cam Patterson, M.D., MBA. “We are pleased to be able to offer this protection from the COVID-19 virus to the employees who have put their health and that of their families at risk to care for our patients. They have been under tremendous physical and emotional strain for more than eight months, and knowing they have additional protection from infection will provide a tremendous sense of relief.

“This vaccine is only the first step in overcoming this virus,” he said. “We will continue to require masks, eye protection and other protective gear for the foreseeable future, as we do not yet know how long the vaccine is effective or whether vaccinated people can transmit the virus. We are confident that the vaccine is safe, and we look forward to being able to offer the vaccine to all our employees, students and patients.”

Arkansas has a plan for vaccine distribution that mirrors the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) plan, which places priority on those most impacted by the coronavirus as first in line to receive the vaccine. This includes health care workers and others at higher risk of significant exposure to the virus.

“I received the vaccine today, and I encourage everyone to be vaccinated once it is available to them,” said Robert Hopkins, M.D., a UAMS professor and division director of General Internal Medicine and chair of the National Vaccine Advisory Committee of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

“The availability of a COVID-19 vaccine is a major milestone, yet it does not represent the end of the fight against the virus. We expect the vaccines to be safe and effective in prevention of severe COVID, but we don’t know yet exactly how effective they will be in use beyond the clinical trials. It will likely be mid-summer before the overall effectiveness of the vaccines is known. The vaccine offers important protection for our frontline care teams, but it’s critical that Arkansans continue to follow recommendations regarding hand washing, social distancing and mask wearing to protect themselves and prevent the spread of COVID-19. It will be many months before we are able to vaccinate enough people to conquer this virus.”

Hopkins said that as the COVID-19 virus continues to change and mutate, it’s possible that yearly COVID-19 booster shots will be required to provide protection from the latest mutation of the virus – just like the influenza virus.

“The vaccines currently available in the United States have undergone extensive safety testing, and I recommend all Arkansans be vaccinated once it is widely available. If you have underlying health conditions, it’s important you talk with your doctor before getting the vaccine.”

UAMS will continue to vaccinate employees and students in the coming weeks and months and will offer the vaccine to patients as the institution is allocated additional doses.

UAMS is the state’s only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS’ clinical enterprise including its hospital, regional clinics and clinics it operates or staffs in cooperation with other providers. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. *U.S. News & World Report* named UAMS Medical Center the state’s Best Hospital; ranked its ear, nose and throat program among the top 50 nationwide; and named six areas as high performing — COPD, colon cancer surgery, heart failure, hip replacement, knee replacement and lung cancer surgery. UAMS has 2,876 students, 898 medical residents and four dental residents. It is the state’s largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children’s Hospital, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit [www.uams.edu](http://www.uams.edu) or [www.uamshealth.com](http://www.uamshealth.com). Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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