

# U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



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December 19, 2020

Dear Fellow Marylander:

This week, media headlines brought incredible news that vaccines for COVID-19 have been approved and are ready for distribution. In fact, the first Americans, mostly frontline health care workers, received the first dose of a two-part vaccine. We have reached this point in record time through the collaboration of dedicated scientists and federal investments in research and supplies. My immense thanks go out to all those who worked around the clock on the development of these vaccines, especially those in the Bethesda-based National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

Getting vaccinated is a key piece in our fight against this deadly COVID-19 virus that has infected [more than 17 million Americans](#) and tragically cost the lives of more than 311,000 Americans. The numbers will continue to rise until we can get the community spread under control.

I have said it before, but cannot say this enough: wearing a mask, maintaining six feet of space from people not in your household, and frequent hand washing are [critical public health tools](#). If more Americans had followed these simple recommendations, we [may have saved hundreds of thousands of lives](#). But we have to deal with where we are today and these newly approved vaccines will play a critical role in preventing further spread in our communities.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “[a vaccine stimulates your immune system](#) to produce antibodies, exactly like it would if you were exposed to the disease. After getting vaccinated, you develop immunity to that disease, without having to get the disease first.”

Without a vaccine, our children’s schools may not be able to safely reopen; businesses, and especially restaurants and event venues, would continue to hemorrhage customers and money; our hospital systems would continue to be overwhelmed with patients as more individuals are infected with COVID-19. A vaccine helps Americans achieve [herd immunity](#) by protecting people from a virus, rather than exposing them to it. With herd immunity, the vast majority of the population are vaccinated, lowering the amount of virus spread in the whole population.

Vaccines help us reach a higher level of immunity by preventing diseases from taking root.

Two versions of a COVID-19 vaccine have been approved for the current emergency use. One is by Pfizer and one by drugmaker Moderna. Others are also nearing the approval stage. While pharmaceutical companies are working to increase available supplies, at present there are not enough doses of the vaccines to provide to every person in this country or around the world. [It has been a mammoth undertaking.](#)

To that end, most of the first wave of vaccines will be prioritized for frontline [health care workers](#) and nursing home residents and staff, for which this pandemic has been most deadly. In addition to seniors, essential workers and those with underlying health conditions and at high risk for complications from COVID-19 could be next in line and then the distribution will move to the general public.

I would strongly encourage everyone to talk with their doctor to gauge their risk and then get vaccinated as soon as a dose is available to you. Like wearing a facemask, getting a vaccine is something we do to keep ourselves safe. But – more importantly – it is something we do to keep safe those we love as well as those in our community we don’t know but may be at high risk. We all need to look out for each other. Only as a community can we fight back against this deadly virus.

I plan to receive the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as it is available to me. While I am healthy, like everyone in my age group, I need to be careful. I maximize the use of technology to keep up virtual visits with Marylanders across the state throughout this year, but my job inherently requires me to trek through the Capitol on a near-daily basis. Without fail, I wind up standing a bit closer than I would like with other senators, staff, security and media, many of whom have traveled from all 50 states to be there for our collective work. Certainly, there are smaller crowds than usual these last

few months during the pandemic, but there are enough interactions that I cannot ask everyone who stops to ask me a question in the hallways, or even on the floor of the Senate, when they last washed their hands or if their face mask is on correctly. Like you, the last thing that I would want to do is unknowingly bring home the virus to my family.

Last week, I led a meeting of the Maryland delegation with Maryland Acting Health Secretary Dennis Schrader and Acting Deputy Secretary of Public Health Dr. Jinlene Chan. The pair outlined steps MDH has taken to prepare Maryland for the first round of vaccine distribution. All of us on the video call urged them to move as quickly as possible and to focus on communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, as well as geography. We cannot allow those hardest hit by the virus to fall through the cracks at this critical moment of relief.

Yesterday, Vice President Pence publicly received his coronavirus vaccine, as did House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and [House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer](#). President-elect Biden plans to receive his vaccine publicly next week, and former Presidents Obama, Bush, and Clinton have committed to publicly receiving the vaccine. I trust the scientists who approved these vaccines, and so do our national leaders. This is not a miracle-cure that will end the pandemic, but it is one of the most critical tools in our arsenal to get our society back to normal. If you have questions about the vaccine, please review public health resources like the MDH guide to the vaccine here: <https://covidlink.maryland.gov/content/vaccine/>.

Lastly, having a vaccine is not the end of this public health crisis. The number of individuals vaccinated will start small and continue to grow. It may be March or April until lower risk individuals have a chance to get vaccinated. The vaccines have proven safe, but more time and additional studies must take place for us to better understand the long-term health protections afforded by the vaccine. We also do not know if the vaccines prevent vaccinated people from spreading the virus – this means, **even after someone is vaccinated, they must still be vigilant with their mask use** and other public health measures.

I urge you to please be cautious this holiday season so that you and those you love are healthy enough to celebrate next year.

Thank you for your efforts and stay safe.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben".

Ben Cardin

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