

HDA Guiding Principles for COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution

Utilizing Distribution Network and Expertise

The most efficient pathway between a manufacturer and a patient is through pharmaceutical distributors, which serve as a critical connection point to a wide array of providers, healthcare settings, long-term care facilities, and pharmacies.

By leveraging the nation's supply chain, the federal government can use existing infrastructure and tap into sophisticated industry logistics expertise, including covering points of administration, provider contacts, manufacturer relationships, and cold chain technologies and capabilities. Replicating or not utilizing the pharmaceutical distribution system would be duplicative, costly, inefficient and could slow the delivery and administration of vaccines to patients.

Pharmaceutical distributors have detailed process flows for receiving, storing and distributing specialty products, including vaccines, as well as historical strategies to execute rapid and secure distribution to administering professionals. Specialty and traditional distributors provide a variety of services, including order management and fulfillment, inventory management, security, special handling services, data services and new product launch support. Further, the industry's well-established expertise in protocols in product stability and maintaining cold chain integrity are integral to maximizing patient and provider access to any approved vaccine safely and efficiently.

Leveraging existing distributor networks would improve patient access by capitalizing on existing relationships with points of administration including retail and independent pharmacies, clinics, long-term care facilities, hospitals and physician offices. These expansive supportive services provide tremendous value to providers and patients. Therefore, fair and equitable compensation should be provided for these services, including inventory management, temperature requirements and data reporting obligation.

Securing the Vaccine Supply

Crucial to successful distribution of COVID-19 vaccines or therapeutics are robust measures to protect the security of the supply chain and product integrity in an environment with heightened risk on several fronts. The United States pharmaceutical supply chain operates the most secure distribution network in the world. The distribution industry has existing, long-standing relationships with trusted trading partners and the expertise to secure the delivery of medicines from their point of manufacture to the point they are dispensed to patients. Putting this experience to use will help patients and protect the supply chain from "bad actors" and counterfeit or substandard product.

Pharmaceutical distributors have extensive experience and capability to manage the storage, transportation and security of vaccines—expertise that will be urgently needed given the nature of the products and the attention a vaccine will draw.

Federal and State Government Partnerships

Federal and state partnerships are critical to meeting public health needs.

- The federal government should provide explicit guidance regarding vaccine prioritization to state officials, including communicating supply constraints. The federal government should work in partnership with state governments to coordinate state prioritizations of vaccines and provide direction to manufacturers and distributors of available product to meet those state needs.
- State public health departments should determine points of administration/providers to administer vaccines and the strategy that best suits their unique demographic needs. States should collaborate with existing supply chain partners to seamlessly execute distribution strategies and tap into existing vaccine distribution assets and infrastructure.

Transparency and Communication

The vaccine prioritization process must be transparent and clearly communicated to reduce confusion and distrust among stakeholders, providers and the public.

A single point of contact at each level of government decision-making will be critical to set expectations regarding vaccine availability, priority access and course of treatment to maximize vaccine adoption and medical adherence.

Given the likelihood of limited initial supply of vaccines, clear communication around prioritization decisions, points of administration and immunization programs is critical to build trust and confidence. Distribution plans should be detailed and explicit, and state and federal authorities need to work in close collaboration with industry to minimize confusion and maximize swift and efficient delivery.

Lines of communication should be clear and transparent so providers and healthcare professionals are assured that they connect swiftly with the appropriate official government and private sector contacts.

About the Healthcare Distribution Alliance

The Healthcare Distribution Alliance (HDA) represents primary pharmaceutical distributors — the vital link between the nation's pharmaceutical manufacturers and pharmacies, hospitals, long-term care facilities, clinics and others nationwide. Since 1876, HDA has helped members navigate regulations and innovations to get the right medicines to the right patients at the right time, safely and efficiently. The HDA Research Foundation, HDA's non-profit charitable foundation, serves the healthcare industry by providing research and education focused on priority healthcare supply chain issues.