Tulane University begins to administer COVID-19 vaccine to faculty, staff

January 12, 2021 5:45 PM

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On Tuesday, Tulane University began administering the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to faculty, staff and students eligible under the state’s current guidelines.

About 50 Tulanians were vaccinated on the first day at the J. Bennett Johnston Building, said Joe Esneault, chief clinical data officer for Tulane University Medical Group. In the upcoming days, hundreds more are expected to be vaccinated. Second doses will follow in three weeks.

PHOTOS: Vaccine rollout at Tulane University

The first dose went to physician Marius Commodore, MD, whose work as the medical director of Tulane Campus Health puts him in close contact with infected students.

“It has a little bit of a historic feel because so many people had a terrible year,” Commodore said of
being in the first wave of vaccinations.

Physicians, nurses and other frontline healthcare workers who work at Tulane hospitals received
the Pfizer vaccine starting in December. The state recently expanded eligibility for faculty, staff and
students of allied health schools who work with others in the New Orleans community. Based on
those guidelines, Tulane is initially vaccinating faculty, staff and students of the schools of
Medicine, Public Health and Tropical Medicine, and Social Work; Campus Health staff; and
frontline food service and custodial/operations staff, as well as employees over 70 years of age.

Video by Ian McLachlan.

Esohe Adun, who works in Dining Services in the School of Medicine cafeteria, said she received
the vaccine notice and scheduled an appointment for the same day, but only after serious
consideration and even discussion with her co-worker. She said she wanted to encourage other
Tulanians and New Orleanians to get the vaccine as well.

“I think it’s very important for them to do it. There’s nothing to worry about,” Adun said. “It helps
the community. We’re all ready to get back to normal.”

Latricia Charles, who conducts COVID-19 testing at the Downtown Living Well Clinic, comes in
contact with COVID-19-infected individuals multiple times a week. The vaccine is reassuring to her,
she said. But she, too, gave the opportunity a lot of thought beforehand.

“I was a little apprehensive about it, too, as I am sure is the case for many,” she said. “The one
thing that really gave me the courage to say, ‘Yes, I will get it,’ is that my mom, who works in the
Emergency Department at University Medical Center [New Orleans], has gotten this same
vaccination and is doing fine, so that gives me hope.”

Microbiologist Lisa Morici, PhD, whose research at the School of Medicine in part involves
adjuvants for COVID-19 vaccines, said she could understand why people may have reservations
about the new vaccine. But “achieving herd immunity through vaccination is the best way to stop
the pandemic,” she said.

“The safety of the vaccine is indisputable at this point,” she added. “The development of the vaccine
in less than one year is a historic accomplishment, but it took many years of dedication, persistence
and collaboration of scientists across the world to get us here … I have a tremendous feeling of
gratitude for the scientists and engineers who labored for decades to improve and ultimately
advance these vaccine platforms for rapid deployment against a global threat like COVID-19.”

Third-year medical student Jason Mathias said he was familiar with how the vaccine works and was
even ready in case he experienced side effects after the second dose, which would be administered
three weeks later.

Commodore, the Campus Health medical director, was also optimistic about the vaccine. Asked
how he felt after the first dose, he replied, “It’s five minutes in; I still feel fine. Hopefully the rest of
it is a non-event.”

For more information about signing up for the COVID-19 vaccine, see Tulane’s FAQ.