

# Vaccinations...from Page 1A

received their second dose of the vaccine.

"We have thousands on our list, and as we're confirming appointments, we're finding that a lot of folks have already gotten their vaccine, which is a really good sign," Church said. "We're also seeing (COVID) numbers dropping in the hospitals and outpatient setting."

"It's not enough of a percentage for it to be herd immunity, but it does make some difference. Of course, people have gotten COVID as well, and they are less likely to be re-infected. So, we're definitely seeing some numbers dropping locally."

Though rare, vaccine side effects may be more severe for some people following their second shot, as immune systems work to respond to the vaccine.

Folks should talk with their doctors about taking over-the-counter medicines like ibuprofen, aspirin, antihistamines or acetaminophen for pain or discomfort after getting



Even though the Feb. 26 second-shot mass clinic was delayed a week due to vaccine delivery issues, most people at the Sports Center Friday were simply relieved to be getting fully vaccinated.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

vaccinated.

"It is not recommended you take these medicines before vaccination for the purpose of trying to prevent side effects, because it is not known how these medications may impact how well the vaccine works," according to the CDC.

Dr. Church said people should steer clear of prescription drugs like prednisone for the alleviation of COVID vaccine symptoms, as these medicines have greater anti-inflammatory properties that are more likely to interfere with healthy immune responses than over-the-counter drugs.

"People who are prescribed on prednisone or steroids for any reason need to discuss with their prescriber regarding vaccine timing," Church said.

Looking ahead, Church is hopeful that his team will be able to continue hosting clinics until they are no longer needed, which will require a greater supply of vaccine from the state to accommodate everyone who wants one eventually.

Vaccine eligibility will be expanding in Georgia starting March 8, and Dr. Church encourages everyone who may be interested in vaccination to sign up with Synergy at [ngvax.com](https://ngvax.com), even if they are not currently eligible.

## Expanded Eligibility & Signups

Gov. Brian Kemp announced on Feb. 25 that he was expanding the list of individuals who are eligible to receive vaccination while supplies remain limited.

So far, early vaccination efforts have been focused on medical workers; long-term care residents and staff; Georgians 65 years of age and older; as well as law enforcement, fire personnel, and other first responders.

Starting March 8, adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their caregivers; parents with children who have complex medical conditions; and Pre-K and K-12 teachers and staff for public and private schools will become eligible.

"I believe it is vitally important for more Georgians to return to normal," Kemp said. "For too many parents, this is simply impossible to do while your child is home learning through a screen."

"Virtual schooling is leaving too many children behind, and parents are literally at wit's end. They are also very exhausted. We must have every student back in the classroom, five days a week, statewide."

For their part, area superintendents have expressed excitement over the announcement, including Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong, who said he is thankful for the upcoming opportunity.

"We are currently in conversations with our local Health Department to set up dates for the vaccines," Berrong said. "My hope is that those vaccines will begin within the next two weeks."

Union County Schools Superintendent John Hill said the news is welcome, as the school system has suffered "many very sick employees as a result of COVID, with long-lasting side effects."

"We want to first vaccinate our medically fragile staff and our staff members with family members they care for who are medically fragile," Hill said. "Then we will move to the remainder of our staff who choose to take the vaccine."

"We plan on starting vaccinations as soon as our Health Department has the vaccine available. We are very thankful the governor has chosen to take care of the people who are teaching our children."

Later in March, Kemp said his office will be looking at the possibility of further expanding vaccination criteria "to include more Georgians with severe underlying health conditions who are not currently eligible as seniors over the age of 65."

"We will be finalizing that timeline and the Georgians affected in the coming days," Kemp said.

Citing avoidance of confusion, Kemp added that the Department of Public Health would be abandoning the use of eligibility categories like "1A-Plus" and "1B," choosing instead to go with an ongoing list describing vaccine eligible people, such as medical workers or teachers.

Additionally, Kemp said the Department of Public Health would be rolling out a new statewide registration tool in March.

District 2 Public

Information Officer Dave Palmer said the tool will be dedicated for use by Public Health, and more details will be released when available.

"Residents can go to this site to make appointments at any Public Health-run vaccination site in Georgia," Palmer said. "We will also continue with our local online registration and Call Center for our District 2 Public Health departments."

Even though Public Health is not actively taking new appointments at this time due to limited availability, people may be able to find an opening following a canceled appointment by checking [phdistrict2.org](https://phdistrict2.org).

Alternatively, people can reach the District 2 Call Center at 770-531-5692 or 1-888-426-5073 to check on appointment availability.

For a regularly updated list of locations receiving vaccine shipments in each county, visit [dph.georgia.gov](https://dph.georgia.gov) and click on the link for the "Vaccine Orders List." People can also find vaccine providers at <https://dph.georgia.gov/locations/covid-vaccination-site>.

For free Public Health COVID-19 testing, visit <https://mako.exchange/splash/GAMakotesting/>. Testing takes place Monday-Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in Hall County, at the Allen Creek Soccer Complex located at 2500 Allen Creek Drive.

## GEMA Vaccination Sites

The state also recently announced a new vaccination initiative between the Governor's Office and the Georgia Emergency Management Agency. People may go to [myvaccinegeorgia.com](https://myvaccinegeorgia.com) to pre-register for a vaccine at one of four GEMA drive-thru sites.

These sites are the Macon Farmers Market, the Albany Georgia Forestry Commission, the Delta Air Museum, and the Habersham County Fairgrounds, with the latter being the closest in North Georgia at 4235 Toccoa Highway Clarkesville, GA 30523.

Vaccinations began Feb. 22, with sites operational Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. GEMA sites are currently only offering Pfizer vaccines.

# Heritage Apples...from Page 1A

growing in the South.

"We have planted an orchard that is full of varieties that were common here 100 years ago," Covington said. "These were rescued from all around the area. A lot of people don't realize that apples were so prolific here, and they are special to this area."

"These apples are endangered, and we are losing their genetics. We believe that these apples have unique qualities to our area, and unfortunately, they are not being used in favor of more common varieties."

While the primary goal of the project is to preserve the history and save the genetics of the apples, the group also hopes to one day introduce the apples back into the market.

"There is a huge agrotourism market for heirloom things, and these are heirloom apples from the South," Covington said. "We would like to bring (as much as possible) back to some production system. Maybe we can find a grower or a producer that is interested in these apples."

"We will allow them to come here and taste to see if they like it and if there is consumer demand for it, then we can get more people to plant this. We want to diversify the market, and we have multifaceted goals in this project. We are preserving the history of the apples and the area while also looking at the market potential."

"Being that we are state property, we know that 50 years from now, the tree we planted two weeks ago is going to be here, and it will be verified so a



Union/Towns Ag Agent Jacob Williams at the Experiment Station on Feb. 22 grafting heritage apple trees, including varieties from 100 years ago.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

producer 20 years from now will know what they get."

The Feb. 22 meeting was not the first gathering for the effort. Participants met recently to plant trees establishing the orchard locally, and they met again to graft new trees to be planted and expand the orchard.

"This is a continuation of what we started just a couple of weeks ago," Covington said. "We are more or less just informing a larger group. We have been working on this and getting the idea and concepts and what it would look like and where we would get those materials."

"We grew out the first set of varieties about a year ago and set them in the ground. We had the trees in pots as a nursery, and now we have an actual orchard."

As the orchard fills in, the Experiment Station will

welcome people in to cultivate a sense of the local heritage for themselves, to see the work and the progress that has been made with the project.

"Once the orchard is fully grown, we want to have public programs and have the public come in here," Covington said. "We will walk them down the tree aisle and give them the names and varieties and let them pick."

"We will do that with producers as well, not only fresh market producers but cider producers. Maybe they will like a certain flavor profile."

In addition to apples, current Experiment Station research focuses on commodities including grapes, blueberries, field corn, sweet corn, soybeans, fescue, orchard grass, alfalfa, ryegrass, tomatoes and beef cattle. For more information, visit [GAMountain.CAES.UGA.edu](https://GAMountain.CAES.UGA.edu).