



## **A vaccine with a dose of confusion**

Jimmy Sengenberger

January 12, 2021

I will say it bluntly: Gov. Jared Polis and his administration have already failed front-line health care workers, “essential workers,” seniors, teachers and many other Coloradans with their botched COVID-19 vaccine rollout.

They had months before the vaccine came out to learn the storage specs and other details; Pfizer even did dry runs of distribution before moving its vaccine. The Polis administration had ample time to prepare for this. Yet their incompetence will come as no surprise to people who understand the true, flawed nature of government.

In just a few months, there have already been at least three iterations of the Polis vaccination plan. I was starting to break down what Versions 1, 2 and 3 included, but I removed the paragraphs because, frankly, there was just too much to say, and it gets too confusing too fast.

The bottom line is this: Every version has prioritized front-line health care workers and long-term care providers above everyone else, but that is the one consistency since Polis submitted his first plan to the Centers for Disease Control back in October.

Subsequent iterations were unveiled on Dec. 9 and Dec. 30. These changed whether teachers or “essential workers” like grocery employees would get greater prioritization (Phase 2 in Version 1, Phase 1b by Version 3), which older block of Coloradans would be eligible and when (65+ with high risk factors in Phase 2 of Version 1, all 70+ in Phase 1b of Version 3) and when “essential frontline journalists” (Phase 3 in Version 1, Phase 1b in Version 3) and people who

work or reside in high-density settings (Phase 2 in Version 1, unmentioned in Version 3) get their shot.

If that paragraph just made your head spin, I'm sorry: That's the level of confusion we've reached amidst a disorganized mess.

As January began and the new plan was operational, appointments for teachers and various classes of essential workers had already been set, particularly in communities that reached Phase 1b and/or as local school districts like Cherry Creek were able to strike deals for their staffs.

Others were ready to schedule appointments. Suddenly, just last week, Colorado's Department of Public Health and Environment ordered a full stop to vaccinations of these groups, thrusting those 70 and older to the top of the line after frontline health care workers. Should this be considered Polis Plan Version 4?

A scramble began. Would those teachers and others scheduled to get their vaccines still get a shot, or would their appointments be canceled? Thankfully, most providers are holding to appointments, but new ones won't be set for them. Whether you agree with the prioritizations or not, Coloradans who expected to make their shot appointments have a right to be angry.

Given the widespread concern over this virus and the desire for people to return to business as usual as soon as possible, there is no excuse for the Polis administration's failure to assuage Coloradans' confusion — promising one thing and then changing the terms within a matter of days. Uncertainty already defines life right now; we don't need the state government adding a new dose of uncertainty into the mix.

With that said, we shouldn't entirely blame Polis and his public health team. In reality and almost by definition, government is always slow to execute a program or initiative, and it's almost inevitably bound for hiccups that frustrate constituents.

It is true that government — namely the Trump administration at the federal level — was critical in financing and removing roadblocks (mostly its own) for private pharmaceutical companies to

research, develop and manufacture the different COVID vaccines. However, that is a far cry from directing a complex product distribution effort. By its very nature, government just isn't built to do this kind of thing well or efficiently.

As the Cato Institute's Michael Cannon has pointed out, government officials likely don't actually know who the highest value recipients of vaccines are, and therefore are not really capable of distributing vaccines effectively.

Unfortunately, the problem only gets worse when officials keep shaking up the rollout map midstream. And that's exactly what has happened. In fact, anyone who has fallen prey to the constant, arbitrary revisions of the CDPHE COVID-19 Dial framework, in which counties were forced into ever-increasing restrictions using arbitrary metrics, could easily predict the vaccine distribution would be botched.

Ronald Reagan observed that the nine worst and most dangerous words in the English language are "I'm from the government, and I'm here to help." Polis's botched vaccine rollout is again proving the truth and wisdom of Reagan's admonition.