Press Release

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

First 'vials of hope' received, COVID-19 vaccine administered at Fort Drum

FORT DRUM, N.Y. (Jan. 12, 2020) -- Medical personnel, emergency responders, health care workers and leaders of the 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Garrison command team were among the first Fort Drum recipients of the COVID-19 vaccine.

But it was Mary Paul, a nurse assigned to the Bowe COVID-19 treatment clinic, who was the very first in line to receive the vaccine on Jan. 11.

“Working with the COVID team since the beginning, it only makes sense,” she said. “If the vaccine is offered, we might as well do our part and start getting the community vaccinated so we can all get back to normal and carry on.”

Maj. Dexter Williams, Army Public Health Nursing chief, said that the installation is following the Department of Defense phased vaccine distribution plan, which includes first responders, public safety personnel and other essential workers in the initial phase.

He said that the Fort Drum medical team and medics from 2nd Brigade Combat Team are working tirelessly to safely administer the vaccine, and that they are happy to do so.

“We are genuinely excited to put our plan into action,” Williams said. “It was a lot of long hours, as a team, planning for this. Now to see it being executed, it’s great.”

When it was his turn to roll up his sleeve, Fort Drum firefighter Grayden Brunet said that he felt it was a responsible thing to do.

“As a firefighter and an EMT (emergency medical technician), I respond to a higher volume of COVID emergencies,” he said. “So, I am taking this vaccine today not only to protect myself, my co-workers and family, but everyone on the installation.”

Fort Drum Police Chief Todd Julian also had no reservations about receiving the vaccine.

“For one, I believe in it,” he said. “And I also believe we really need to get ahead of this pandemic, and we can do that with this vaccine. Hopefully, people follow suit, so I thought it was important that I demonstrate some leadership by being here today.”

Julian said that there is a lot of information available about the vaccine for people who have questions about its safety and effectiveness.

“Our leadership and the medical command on Fort Drum has kept us well-informed about this, and I feel I have enough knowledge to make this decision,” he said.

Clinical trials for the vaccine have shown it to be safe and effective, which led the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to issue an Emergency Use Authorization. Information about vaccine safety is available at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety.html.

The vaccine is administered in two doses, three weeks apart. After receiving the first dose, each participant is given a vaccination card that is required when returning for the second inoculation.

While vaccination is voluntary, senior leaders are encouraging everyone to receive the shot when it is available to them.

“It’s about protecting our team, our teammates, our mission and our families,” said Brig. Gen. Brett Funck, 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum acting senior commander.

When Col. Jeffery Lucas, Fort Drum garrison commander, arrived at the Occupational Health center for his vaccination, he was eager to get feedback from DES personnel.

“It was great to see our firefighters, security guards and law enforcement officers here today, who all want to help our community get through this pandemic as soon as possible,” he said.

Lucas joined a list of senior leaders, including Funck, Command Sgt. Maj. Mario Terenas and Command Sgt. Maj. Roberto Munoz who were inoculated in the initial distribution. Maj. Gen. Brian Mennes, 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum commander, is receiving his vaccination while on deployment in Afghanistan.

“To get through the pandemic, as many as us as possible need to receive the vaccine,” Lucas said. “To demonstrate the confidence in the vaccine and the medical personnel who are distributing it to us, I thought it was important that leaders demonstrate that confidence by getting their vaccination.”

Many of the DES first responders said that it felt no different than getting any other inoculation. But on a grander scale, Lucas said it was.

“Each one of these vaccines is like a vial of hope,” he said. “When you see members of our community, our front-line workers and emergency personnel wanting to get vaccinated, they are saying that they put our community first.”

In the coming weeks, other people will have the opportunity to receive the vaccine, including deploying service members, high-risk community members and, lastly, the healthy population. Fort Drum Medical Activity officials, overseeing the vaccination rollout on post, said that the vaccine eventually will be available to all TRICARE beneficiaries.

“For me, the big picture to keep in mind is that this is about saving lives and keeping people healthy,” Williams said. “That’s what we do every day.”

While the vaccination is a significant step forward in the fight against COVID-19, Fort Drum community members are reminded that General Order 1F is still in effect, and everyone must continue to adhere to all safety protocols in place – wear a face mask, practice physical distancing and personal hygiene, and follow appropriate restriction of movement.

“The virus is still here, and we’re still in a defensive posture,” Williams said. “So, we need to continue to wear our masks, stay home when sick, wash your hands regularly and avoid large gatherings. If we do all that, we will see this pandemic come to an end.”

To learn more about the COVID-19 vaccination plan, visit https://guthrie.tricare.mil/Health-Services/COVID-19-Update/COVID-19-Vaccine.

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Media with inquiries regarding this press release should contact Fort Drum Public Affairs, Julie Halpin, 315-772-8286, julie.a.halpin2.civ@mail.mil.

Media B-Roll available at: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1jmYr1O7vG1PMDvbq7kWsA4unYc3is3F8

Captions:

(FD vaccinations 2) Col. Jeffery Lucas receives the COVID-19 vaccine Jan. 12 at the Occupational Health center in Guthrie Ambulatory Health Care Clinic from Sgt. Gregory Yacovou, a medic with 2nd Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (LI). Lucas joins several senior leaders to set the example at Fort Drum about the importance of getting vaccinated to fight the pandemic. Fort Drum Medical Activity personnel, health care workers and first responders were among the first community members on post to get vaccinated, in accordance with the Department of Defense phased vaccine distribution plan. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

(FD vaccinations 4) Fort Drum Police Chief Todd Julian was among the fire and law enforcement personnel to visit Guthrie Ambulatory Health Care Clinic on Jan. 12 to receive the COVID-19 vaccination during the first week of the phased vaccine distribution plan. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

(FD vaccinations 1) Command Sgt. Maj. Roberto Munoz, Fort Drum garrison senior enlisted adviser, receives the COVID-19 vaccine Jan 12 at the Occupational Health center in Guthrie Ambulatory Health Care Clinic from Sgt. Edwin Robles, a medic with 2nd Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (LI). Munoz joins several senior leaders to set the example at Fort Drum about the importance of getting vaccinated to fight the pandemic. Fort Drum Medical Activity personnel, health care workers and first responders were among the first community members on post to get vaccinated, in accordance with the Department of Defense phased vaccine distribution plan. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

(Nurse Paul Vaccine) Fort Drum Medical Activity personnel administered the first COVID-19 vaccines Jan. 11. Mary Paul, a nurse with the Bowe COVID-19 treatment clinic and Chicago native, was the very first person to receive the vaccine on post (Photo by Warren Wright, Fort Drum MEDDAC PAO)