

# Vaccine Rollout...from Page 1A

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.

The Ingles Pharmacies in Blairsville and Hiawassee are accepting eligible patient signups from the public at [www.ingles-markets.com/covid19-waitlist](http://www.ingles-markets.com/covid19-waitlist).

Synergy Health of Hiawassee is also adding patients to its vaccine waitlist via a brand-new, easy to remember website at [www.ngvax.com](http://www.ngvax.com). Looking ahead, Synergy Health plans on hosting mass vaccine clinics as supplies become available.

People utilizing [ngvax.com](http://ngvax.com) will receive immediate confirmation on the website that they have successfully signed up for the waitlist. Furthermore, folks who register there will be notified once an appointment becomes available, so there's no need to call the office to verify.

Already, Synergy has more than 2,000 people awaiting vaccination from Towns, Union, and other

nearby areas, and Synergy's Dr. Samuel L. Church is asking that patients only sign up for one vaccine list at a time to maximize the number of people able to get in line.

District 2 Public Health is responsible for distributing vaccines to local health departments for residents in Union and Towns counties, though people have reported being unable to get through to the designated Call Center to schedule vaccination.

Indeed, for many people, the Call Center number has been ringing through to a message saying it is "not a working number," but Public Health officials have said this simply means too many people are calling in at once and overwhelming the system.

People are being encouraged to keep trying the Call Center at 1-888-426-5073 or 770-531-5692. Center hours are Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 7:30 a.m. to 4:45 p.m., and Tuesdays from 7:30 a.m. to 6:45 p.m. Callers should expect to wait on the line after getting through.

District 2 Public Health is hoping to alleviate some of its signup woes by bringing in the private company MAKO Medical to take over all its COVID-19 testing starting Jan. 22.

As such, appointments for free Public Health COVID-19 testing can be made at <https://mako.exchange/splash/GAmakotesting/>. Testing will take place in Hall County at 2500 Allen Creek Drive in Gainesville.

Shifting testing to a private company will allow Public Health to free up its existing workforce to concentrate solely on getting vaccines to the most people, as will an internal hiring drive for new employees and volunteer recruitment efforts for local health departments.

Moreover, District 2 officials have been working with local partners for rollout. In addition to coordinating efforts with Synergy Health in Towns County, District 2 is now working with the Union County Government, which has been asking what more it can do to get the ball rolling.

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris held a meeting with District 2 Public Health on Friday, Jan. 15, in which stakeholders finalized plans for a joint Union/Towns mass vaccination clinic, to feature at least 300 vaccinations with the potential to add more this week.

Paris said he wanted to facilitate getting COVID shots into as many arms as possible,

so he has volunteered the use of the Union County Sports Center for the effort. Assisting in vaccine administration will be medical professionals with the Union County Fire Department.

The mass clinic will take place over 12 hours on Friday, Jan. 22, and will be by appointment only. People may sign up for a vaccine spot on a first-come, first-served basis at [phdistrict2.org](http://phdistrict2.org), and officials are asking people not to call the local Health Department for appointments.

Participating individuals will want to arrive masked, wear loose-fitting clothing to receive their vaccination, be prepared to wait 15 minutes for observation, and return 28 days later for a booster dose.

Eligible people can use the same web portal on the District 2 site to sign up for regular vaccine appointments to receive shots at the local Health Department as they become available.

Currently, all Health Department vaccine appointments are booked through February, but more time slots are expected to come online in the coming weeks as vaccine supplies increase, and as Public Health expands its logistical capabilities moving forward.

Appointment availability is subject to change, so people should check back with the website regularly.

The Northeast Georgia Physicians Group out of Gainesville is also offering people a chance to sign up for vaccination at [www.nghs.com/covid-19/vaccine-registration](http://www.nghs.com/covid-19/vaccine-registration), though there's no waitlist for appointments presently, so people will want to check back daily.

There are several known side effects associated with COVID-19 vaccination, such as fever, headache, and rarer but more serious complications, with the most common side effect being injection site soreness.

People will need to weigh the risks individually and in consultation with health care providers, but so far, for the most vulnerable to severe illness, many doctors continue to believe the risks of the vaccine are unlikely to be greater than the risks of COVID itself.

## Hospitalizations Keep Rising

And while Union General Health System is not offering vaccinations to the public, officials there are vaccinating their own staff and health care partners so they may continue

servicing these communities, with the first round of second doses being administered in-house this week.

Union General Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett said the hospital in Union County is over capacity, with two additional COVID units open and full currently. The formerly "clean" Chatuge Regional Hospital in Towns County is now caring for COVID patients also.

"Unfortunately, we had to start overflowing COVIDs there a couple of weeks ago," Barnett said. "There is nowhere to transfer them to; all the hospitals in our region are at capacity."

"They have an entire wing walled off at Chatuge, and we have had as many as 10 COVID patients at our high point. It has been almost unbearable for our little hospital system, but we have taken good care of folks."

Barnett said the high for the entire pandemic has been nearly 50 COVID inpatients at once between Union General and Chatuge, with people coming in sick from all over the area — that was just last week, and not including inpatients hospitalized for other reasons.

To say it's been a challenge for the two hospitals, as it has for hospitals across the nation, would be an understatement, though Barnett said they have been able to manage thanks to the hard work of their staff and support from the community.

"I am about to go in for a 12-hour shift to work one of the COVID units," Barnett said Saturday evening. "It has taken everyone working nonstop to take care of our communities. I am proud of what we have done."

Dr. Church, who treats patients at Chatuge Regional, Murphy Medical and Northeast Georgia Medical, concurred with Barnett's assessment of the current state of COVID and hospital care, saying that people need to remain vigilant in their efforts to slow the spread of the disease.

And though hospitalizations are up, importantly, the hospitals are still taking all patients in need of urgent care, with administrators urging people experiencing medical emergencies not to hesitate in coming to the hospital for immediate treatment.

"I don't want people to misunderstand the situation," Union General Spokesperson Leslie Daniel said. "People must know it is OK to come to the hospital when sick. The hospital will take care of them."

# Coach Allison...from Page 1A

lineman has stepped away from the Union County program. In 2002, Allison took the reins at Winder-Barrow, leading the Bulldogs for six seasons before returning home in 2008.

During his stint at Winder, Allison finished 25-36 with one playoff appearance in 2003. In 25 seasons as a head

coach, Allison owns a career record of 146-113 and a .563 winning percentage.

According to UCHS Principal C.T. Hussion and Athletic Director Mandy Hunter, there is currently no timetable on naming Allison's replacement, though they said the coaching vacancy

had already garnered plenty of interest within hours of Allison's exit.

For more coverage of Coach Allison's departure from Panther athletics, be sure to look inside for this week's Sports Section.

# Murphy Hwy Wreck...from Page 1A



**This Honda Pilot sustained disabling damage after a Ford Explorer crossed into its path causing a collision on Murphy Highway Jan. 16, per GSP.**

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

plates crossed the centerline of Murphy Highway and struck a white Honda Pilot with Union County plates that was driving in the left southbound lane, per GSP.

After impact, the Explorer traveled off the west shoulder of the road and down an embankment before striking trees and coming to rest on its top, GSP said, while the Honda came to a rest straddling both southbound lanes and facing west.

The front right passenger of the Explorer suffered fatal injuries, and the driver of that vehicle was airlifted to Northeast Georgia Medical Center. The Honda Pilot's driver sustained only minor injuries, per GSP.

Responding to the scene

were GSP, the Union County Sheriff's Office, Union General EMS, Union County Fire, Air Life Georgia, with assistance from Tanner's 24-Hour Towing

and coordination by Union County E-911.

More information will be released as it becomes available, per GSP.

## District 2 Public Health to shift free COVID-19 testing to MAKO Medical



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Prevent. Promote. Protect.

GAINESVILLE — Beginning January 22, 2021, covid-19 testing in District 2 will be conducted by MAKO Medical. Appointments for Friday, January 22 and later, can be made at this link: <https://mako.exchange/splash/>

GAmakotesting/

The last days that District 2 Public Health will operate the testing site will be Tuesday, January 19 and Wednesday, January 20 from 8:30 AM to 12 PM.

In addition, as we transition from testing to vaccination, District 2 will cease symptomatic testing at all 13 county health departments. January 22 will be the last day that rapid tests will be available. NTJan20/27/CA