COVID-19

Ohio | Department of Health

Provider Guidance: Health Equity Considerations Getting Vaccine to Ohio's Most Vulnerable

Ohio's Vulnerable Populations

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, segments of Ohio's population have faced increased risk for exposure to COVID-19, including developing serious complications or death from the disease. These vulnerable populations, many with preexisting underlying medical conditions, may live or work in settings that elevate their risk.

The **Vulnerable Populations Data Project** provides data at the Census-tract level to local health departments in Ohio to help them identify communities in their areas with a high density of vulnerable populations and the greatest number of households at risk. The data from these communities points to several factors contributing to low uptake of vaccine, including living in multi-unit dwellings and crowded households, having limited English proficiency, preexisting medical conditions, inadequate access to transportation, and being homebound or homeless.

Other vaccine providers can work with the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) for information about obtaining vaccine data for vulnerable communities. The state identifies communities with high social vulnerability based on data provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Social Vulnerability Index.

ODH Outreach

ODH is actively monitoring the amount of vaccine being distributed by demographic group and locality. ODH also uses "vaccination channel leads" (staff members who lead specific vaccination strategies) to monitor the amount of vaccine distributed by providers to Ohio's most vulnerable communities. Whenever significant opportunities for improvement are identified, ODH conducts outreach to offer providers additional support and technical assistance to help get vaccine into every vulnerable community in Ohio.

The Role of Providers and Local Health Departments

All vaccine providers are encouraged to consider focused strategies to make vaccine options available to vulnerable populations. Ohio's Health Equity Initiative seeks to increase access to COVID-19 vaccine to the most vulnerable and in areas that have low uptake of vaccine, including rural communities. The Health Equity team collaborates with community organizations and providers to host clinics and meet people "where they are." Providers can help through their willingness to join in these community efforts to make vaccine available at community events, places of worship, and other locations that offer convenience while employing non-traditional methods and extended hours.

Strategies for Reaching Vulnerable Populations

Vulnerable populations often experience barriers to accessing healthcare. These barriers can include lack of adequate transportation, inaccessible locations, limited English proficiency, lack of computer literacy or access, and employment that does not offer paid time off for medical appointments. Below are examples of strategies providers can employ to negate potential barriers to access and ensure equitable vaccine distribution.

- Advertise vaccination locations on non-web-based platforms, including print materials at local libraries, grocery stores, or faith-based organizations and in other languages appropriate for the target populations in the area.
- Make sure appointments can be made by phone as well as online.
- Secure interpretation or translation services if needed.
- Ensure that identification requirements are used to verify name and date of birth, not residence or immigration status.
- Offer after-hours or weekend vaccination services to accommodate those who are working, possibly without paid leave.
- Set up vaccination clinics along bus routes and near bus stops to accommodate those who do not drive or have mobility challenges.
- If feasible, consider offering mobile vaccination services in communities where vaccine provider options are limited or far away or in communities where public transportation is limited.
- Consider working with other healthcare providers, including EMS/fire, to partner with faith-based organizations to offer pop-up vaccination locations in underserved communities or communities with fewer vaccine providers.
- Partner with trusted nonprofit and community-based organizations to host vaccination days in high-risk neighborhoods.
- Engage ethnic media and trusted leaders to promote vaccination dates and information.
- When possible, host clinics that welcome walk-in patients, not requiring advance appointment scheduling or use of online apps.
- Consider special needs, such as ease of access for people with disabilities or mobility issues, of the populations you serve.
- Consider hosting vaccination clinics at locations frequently visited by those who may belong to vulnerable populations, such as community or recreation centers or libraries,food pantries, churches, mosques, or other places of worship.
- Report race and ethnicity data. The gathering of this information is at the heart of ensuring optimal health and fairness for all Ohioans. Consistently collecting and reporting this data is also critical to understand the impact of COVID-19 and ensure that vaccine is reaching groups who are negatively affected by disparities related to cases, hospitalizations, and deaths.

Communication Messages and Channels

Providers need to clearly and publicly state how and when they will administer the vaccine. Providers should use all possible communication methods, including websites, social media posts, phone recordings, existing healthcare network communications systems (app notifications, email newsletters), and local news and ethnic media.

Eligible recipients need to know:
- How will the clinic operate? Is it a drive-thru, or will it be set up inside the building?
- Will appointments be available/required? If so, how can an appointment be scheduled?
- Are flexible walk-in hours available?
- Anticipated wait times.
- Dates and times, including extended hours (evenings and weekends).
- Will interpreting services be offered for those with limited English proficiency or who are deaf or hard of hearing?
- Which vaccine products will you have available? For example, parents of eligible youth will be specifically looking for locations that offer the Pfizer vaccine. Some may be interested in a single-dose vaccine.
- Clinic location and contact information.
  - How to prepare for the appointment (eating/drinking before arriving, bringing appropriate ID, etc.), and what to expect at the appointment.

Communications Resources Available

COVID-19 Vaccination Clinics
- ODH has partnered with federally qualified health centers to make COVID-19 vaccines more readily available to minority and vulnerable populations. Throughout Ohio, pop-up vaccination sites are open to Ohioans currently eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccines and typically require advance registration. Information on these clinics, as well as downloadable flyers, can be found on the COVID-19 Vaccination Pop-Up Clinics page at coronavirus.ohio.gov.

Trusted Vaccination Information
- Providers should enlist community partners and use any additional efforts that have supported vaccine uptake in your community. ODH has a COVID-19 Vaccine Communications Toolkit to assist you with messaging. The toolkit includes talking points, language tips, graphics and artwork, social media messages, and useful resources and links.
- In addition, ODH has a Communications Resources Hub to help share information about COVID-19 vaccine. The Communications Resources Hub offers various print, digital, audio, and video resources and educational materials. The webpage offers materials created for specific groups, including minorities and Ohioans who speak English as a second language. Please contact minorityhealth@odh.ohio.gov to share suggestions.
- Also available are videos of town hall events designed to help Ohioans sift through the myths and learn where they can find reliable, trustworthy information about COVID-19 vaccines. Separate events were provided for specific groups, including African American Ohioans, Hispanic Ohioans, Asian American and Pacific Islander Ohioans, and rural Ohioans.

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For more information on COVID-19, please visit coronavirus.ohio.gov. For answers to your COVID-19 questions, call 1-833-4-ASK-ODH (1-833-427-5634).