

Recommendations for Increasing COVID-19 Vaccination Rates

Among Black/African American Chicagoans: July 2022

Background

Since the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine, the Chicago Department of Public Health and numerous health care and social service providers have been working tirelessly to ensure that Chicagoans have the information and access needed to receive COVID-19 vaccines and boosters. As of late June, 77.1% of the city's residents have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, while 69.5% of the city's residents have completed the vaccine series¹. Yet, despite this significant progress, there remain disparities amongst racial/ethnic groups in Chicago. In particular, only 62.1% of Non-Latinx Black Chicagoans have received one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, while 56% have completed the vaccine series².

On Thursday, June 30, EverThrive IL and the Chicago Department of Public Health hosted a Roundtable Discussion at Malcolm X College: *Increasing COVID-19 Vaccination Rates Among Black/African Americans in Chicago*. The goal of the roundtable was to increase public awareness regarding disparities in vaccination rates among Black/African American Chicagoans and involve key stakeholders in a collaborative effort to find methods for closing the gap and increasing COVID-19 immunization rates. The timing is more critical than ever, given the recent FDA approval of the COVID-19 vaccine for the six-month to four-year-old population and the recent announcement of an updated COVID-19 vaccine for the Fall. We aim to close the gap in vaccination rates, as well as ensure families have access to accurate information and vaccines for infants.

At the event, over 75 attendees from health care organizations, social service providers, schools, community-based organizations, and the health department, among others, reviewed data on vaccination rates in Chicago, received an overview of how [Health Equity Zones](#) have been working over the past year to increase COVID-19 vaccination rates, and engaged with a panel discussion of community members and immunization stakeholders working to increase vaccination rates amongst Black/African American Chicagoans. Finally, attendees participated in table discussions to brainstorm how the City and partners can continue to increase COVID-19 vaccination rates for Black/African American Chicagoans.

The following recommendations were developed from the information shared during the panel discussion, the table discussions, and additional conversations with community members and organizations. The majority of the recommendations build upon and expand the work that CDPH has already implemented over the past year.

¹ <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/covid-19/home/covid-dashboard.html>

² <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/covid19-vaccine/home/covid-19-vaccine-coverage.html>

Recommendations

Partnerships

- 1. Strengthen the partnership the Chicago Department of Public Health has already established between Chicago Public Schools, Health Care Providers, and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to continue to utilize schools as a hub for COVID-19 vaccination education and uptake.**
 - Strengthen coordination and develop clear processes for how community-based and health care organizations can partner with Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to host vaccination events. This includes strengthening partnerships with Chicago Public Schools' network chiefs, CPS central office, schools, and CBOs
 - Increase the number of resource fairs (e.g., connecting families to wraparound services, such as food, clothing, rental assistance, etc.) and vaccination events that are hosted at schools by community-based organizations
 - Offer incentives and foster healthy competition amongst schools to support increasing vaccination rates in school-aged populations (e.g., use thermometers/other visuals to track vaccination progress and offer awards/events for schools with the greatest vaccination rates and greatest improvement rates)
 - Utilize schools and trusted school personnel as a route for parent education, including the importance of getting children and adolescents vaccinated
 - Facilitate discussions between young people and their parents to increase vaccine uptake in children and adolescents
 - Expand the use of youth ambassadors to provide peer-to-peer vaccine education

Messaging and Communications

- 2. Increase alignment of COVID-19 messaging across sectors, ensuring educational materials are representative of Black/African American communities and include testimonies from trusted community members.**
 - Ensure that COVID-19 messaging from various entities, including the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH), Chicago Public Schools (CPS), and community-based organizations are consistent and co-branded as much as possible
 - Take a strengths-based approach to communications that highlight the positives and not just the negatives when using messaging (e.g., the progress we've made on vaccinations)
 - Expand the use of testimonials from trusted community members with diverse backgrounds, including those that have historical mistrust of the health care system
- 3. Expand events and tailored messaging toward specific communities or populations.**

- Continue to share messaging towards younger populations, including children, so that young people can start conversations with caregivers about the vaccine. Disseminate toolkits to stakeholders and through media channels
 - Encourage health care providers to utilize similar tactics that are used with other vaccines with high hesitancy, such as HPV. This includes normalizing the vaccine as another routine vaccination and offering the COVID-19 vaccine with other routine childhood vaccinations
 - Continue to create opportunities for educational events that provide more in-depth information about the COVID-19 vaccine, which expands on the talking points used in one-pagers. This includes highlighting the variability of the severity of COVID-19, the difference in outcomes of vaccinated vs. unvaccinated individuals, why it's still important to get the vaccine if you've already had COVID-19, why it's important to get a booster, and the most immediate effects of COVID-19
 - Expand the use of interfaith working groups to reach faith-involved populations, and ensure that multiple faith leaders are able to provide follow-up communications to members
 - Disseminate broadly accurate information with caregivers about the vaccine for the six-month to four-year-old population, including creating opportunities to discuss the vaccine with other caregivers
 - Reiterate that information on COVID-19 is constantly evolving, and ensure that community leaders have a way of accessing the most up-to-date information to share with partners
 - Expand the physical placement of messaging in target neighborhoods (signs, etc.), in addition to the use of social media
- 4. Expand the use of community members as vaccine ambassadors/educators to build trust within communities.**
- Expand the use of outreach workers and other trusted community members to spread accurate information about the COVID-19 vaccine on an ongoing basis, shifting away from one-off events
 - Acknowledge and include conversations about the historical mistrust of the health care system/providers when providing vaccine education

Access

- 5. Maintain practices that reduce access barriers for each appointment in the vaccine series.**
- Continue non-traditional models for receiving vaccinations, including home-based vaccinations and other models where vaccines can be brought to patients to reduce the travel burden



- Encourage health care providers to adopt the best practice of setting up second dose appointments before they leave their first appointment to increase completion of the vaccine series
- Continue to host vaccination education and administration events in partnership with community groups that are working to address the top priorities/needs of families, such as housing, food access, or violence prevention

Next Steps

CDPH and EverThrive IL will launch a multisector Equitable Vaccine Advisory Council, comprised of a diverse group of public health professionals, Chicago Public Schools representatives, health care professionals, youth, and faith and community leaders, in the coming months that will continue to provide feedback on the implementation of the recommendations and advise on efforts to advance COVID-19 and pediatric vaccinations in Chicago. This council will be led by a Vaccine Equity Manager, who will be in charge of convening the Council and supporting the group with tracking progress on implementing the recommendations. The Equitable Vaccine Advisory Council will also have an Adolescent Advisory Council subcommittee that will focus specifically on vaccination efforts for young people.

If anyone is interested in participating in the Equitable Vaccine Advisory Council or Adolescent Advisory Council, please reach out to Ceci Tipiani-Fuentes at CTipianiFuentes@everthriveil.org. We look forward to partnering with you!