Ways to Ensure Your Community Gets COVID-19 Vaccines

Rural communities have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people in rural communities are at increased risk for COVID-related severe illness, hospitalization, and death because of chronic health conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity. At the same time, many rural communities have limited access to health care, meaning they may also have limited access to COVID-19 vaccines.

Vaccines are an important tool in ending the COVID-19 pandemic. As a rural leader, you can help bridge the COVID-19 vaccine access gap and ensure members of your community get COVID-19 vaccines as soon as they can.

How to Bridge the COVID-19 Vaccine Access Gap

Promote the preventive measures in your community

First and foremost, make sure your community members know about the important ways they can protect themselves and others from getting and spreading COVID-19 and ultimately end the pandemic:

- Get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as you can. You have three ways to find vaccines near you:
  - Go to vaccines.gov
  - Text your ZIP code to 438829
  - Call 1-800-232-0233
• Until you're fully vaccinated (2 weeks after your final dose):
  • Wear a mask over your nose and mouth when inside public places.
  • Stay at least 6 feet (two arm lengths) away from people who don’t live with you and who may not be vaccinated.
  • Avoid being in crowds.
  • Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
  • Avoid gatherings in poorly ventilated indoor spaces.
  • Wash your hands often.

Another way to reduce the spread of COVID-19 is to avoid unnecessary travel. Check out CDC's Road Travel Toolkit for Transportation Partners, which provides travel guidance, road trip planning guides, road sign messaging, and other resources you can promote in your community.

Ensure local doctors and other providers know they can call CDC’s Clinician On-Call Center, a 24-hour hotline for answering COVID-19 questions. Dial 1-800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) and ask for the Clinician On-Call Center.

**Warn your community about who is at increased risk for severe illness**

People at higher risk for severe COVID-19 include:

• Older adults
• Pregnant people
• People with certain medical conditions

Encourage people who meet these criteria to get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as they can. Remind people in your community that the vaccines are free and available to everyone age 12 and older in the United States, regardless of your immigration status and whether you have health insurance.

Each state has (and even each vaccination site may have) different identification and proof of eligibility requirements to get vaccinated. Remind people before they go to their vaccination appointment to confirm what identification and proof of eligibility they may need to bring with them.

**Know who to turn to for trustworthy information**
COVID-19 testing, vaccines, and other health information can be hard for people in rural communities to find. People in your community can find out where to get a vaccine near you at [vaccines.gov](https://wecandothis.hhs.gov/rural-ways-to-ensure-community-gets-covid-19-vaccines)

Other trusted sources of information include local primary care providers and pharmacists. Also identify the state, local, or tribal health department in your area. Share the contact information for these facilities with your community members so they know:

- How to get tested for COVID-19.
- When and where to get a COVID-19 vaccine.

Consult with your local [health department](https://wecandothis.hhs.gov/rural-ways-to-ensure-community-gets-covid-19-vaccines) to get regular updates about COVID-19 cases in your area and the availability of vaccines. Share this information with community leaders and the public.

It can be helpful to develop informational cards to hand out to members of your community that list key COVID-19 health information, such as important contact information, websites, and vaccination sites.

**Form a coalition to widely share information in your community**

Work with different community partners to get their creative ideas on ways to protect the community and get their help to reach everyone in the community with information about COVID-19 vaccination efforts, prevention and testing information, and other resources. Partners may include:

- Health departments
- [State offices of rural health](https://wecandothis.hhs.gov/rural-ways-to-ensure-community-gets-covid-19-vaccines)
- [State rural health associations](https://wecandothis.hhs.gov/rural-ways-to-ensure-community-gets-covid-19-vaccines)
- Businesses
- Pharmacists
- Employers
- Nutritionists
- Faith-based organizations
- Community health workers
- Advocacy organizations
- Educators
• Counselors

Promote safety guidance for specific groups

Work with your local health care providers to share trustworthy safety guidance from your local health department, the state, and CDC for employers, educators, health care professionals, parents, and other groups. CDC’s regularly updated guidance covers many topics, including how to safely operate your business during the COVID-19 pandemic. You can find guidance specific to your community through your local health department.

Advocate for a vaccination center in your community

Planning to host a federally supported vaccination center begins with the Community Vaccination Centers Playbook. This playbook includes guidance for allocating federal support to state, tribal, and territorial community vaccination centers. First steps include working with partners to identify resources and meeting Federal Emergency Management Agency requirements.

For more information

For the latest information, including communication resources, go to the CDC website. CDC has created several COVID-19 communication resources for the public. Rural community leaders can use these communication resources (including videos), when appropriate. These materials are also available in Spanish and other language translations.

More innovative ideas for education, outreach, and some treatment plans can be found on the Rural Health Information Hub.

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