

Charles D. Baker
Governor

Karyn Polito
Lieutenant Governor



Marylou Sudders
Secretary

COVID-19 Vaccine Equity Update to the Legislature November 8, 2022



STATUTORY REQUIREMENT

CHAPTER 22 OF THE ACTS OF 2022

[HTTPS://MALEGISLATURE.GOV/LAWS/SESSIONLAWS/ACTS/2022/CHAPTER22](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2022/Chapter22)

SECTION 30. Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, the secretary of health and human services shall prepare and implement a detailed comprehensive COVID-19 vaccination equity plan, including interim goals, benchmarks and timelines, to significantly increase the proportion of adults and children who are fully vaccinated for COVID-19, including booster vaccinations, among communities in the commonwealth that have disproportionately low vaccination rates, which may include, but shall not be limited to, minority, immigrant and low-income communities. The goal of the plan shall be to eliminate disparities in the rates of vaccination. The plan shall include: (i) mechanisms necessary to directly deliver medically and scientifically accurate, culturally competent and linguistically diverse information about the safety and efficacy of vaccination, including particularly the COVID-19 vaccine, and the pathways to receiving a COVID-19 vaccine; (ii) a complete list of existing or new community-based partnerships for implementation of the plan, including an explanation of the role of local public health departments or boards of health, community-rooted faith-based organizations and locally-based health care providers in implementing the plan; and (iii) a budget for implementation with funding sources identified. The secretary shall provide the plan in writing to the house and senate committees on ways and means, the joint committee on COVID-19 and emergency preparedness and management and the joint committee on public health and make the plan publicly available on the website of the department of public health not later than 30 days after the effective date of this section. The secretary shall report progress towards achieving the equity plan goals by region, by municipality and statewide not less than every 60 days following the completion of the plan.

COVID-19 VACCINE EQUITY 60-DAY UPDATE TO THE LEGISLATURE

OVERVIEW

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health submitted its [Vaccine Equity Plan](#) to the Legislature on March 15, 2022. This report represents an update to that plan, with details about our continuing efforts to increase access to and uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine. In the 60 days since the [last report on September 9, 2022](#):

- First dose rates in the VEI communities increased by 1.4 percentage points to 84%, while fully vaccinated rates increased 1.3 percentage points to 72%.
- First dose pediatric (ages 5-11) vaccinations in VEI communities increased by 1.6 percentage points to 50%, while fully vaccinated pediatric rates increased 1.5 percentage point to 40.3%.
- First dose rates in children 6 months to 4 years old are currently at 12.5% for VEI communities and have increased 4.4 percentage points since the September 2022 report.
- First dose booster rates in the VEI communities are currently at 38.7%, an increase of 1.6 percentage points from the previous report, based on the entire population, while second dose booster rates are currently 11%, up 4.5 percentage points from the previous report.

Our commitment to ensuring vaccine access in the Commonwealth is yielding positive results. [A recent Lancet study reported](#) that Massachusetts' immunity due to high levels of COVID-19 vaccination have helped Massachusetts residents avoid "excess mortality," or deaths, during two surges in the pandemic (late February 2021 – June 2021 and late February 2022 – June 2022).

Massachusetts is a national leader in COVID-19 vaccination rates; 92% of the population age 6 months and over has received at least one dose, compared with 80% nationally. 60% of fully vaccinated individuals in Massachusetts have had a monovalent or bivalent booster.

We must build on these successes and continue to identify and reduce barriers, increase access, and promote awareness regarding the effectiveness and safety of COVID-19 vaccines, and now variant boosters.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: FALL VACCINATION CLINICS

On October 24, 2022, VEI launched a Fall COVID-19 Vaccination Initiative to increase vaccination rates, with a focus on boosters. The approach is part of VEI's ongoing effort to build trust and understanding of the importance of vaccination.

The Fall COVID-19 Vaccination Initiative expands coverage to additional communities with low booster rates and a high percentage of BIPOC residents. To reach people in these communities, VEI is offering vaccination incentives and tailored communications.

The Strategy extends beyond the 20 VEI communities to include ten additional municipalities: Amherst, Attleboro, Avon, Chicopee, Dudley, Gardner, Southbridge, Taunton, Webster, and West Springfield. It also extends to three rural clusters: The Islands (Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard), Northern Berkshires (Adams, Cheshire, Florida, North Adams, Savoy, and Williamstown), and Quaboag Valley (Belchertown, Brimfield, Brookfield, East Brookfield, Holland, Monson, North Brookfield, Palmer, Wales, Ware, Warren, and West Brookfield).

These additional communities are the 10 municipalities and three rural areas with the lowest booster rates and highest BIPOC populations.

Incentives

Based on the efficacy of incentives documented in the last 60-day update submitted in September, participating fall clinics are offering a \$75 gift card with each dose administered (whether primary series or booster). Gift cards are offered at participating clinics in the 20 VEI communities and the additional municipalities listed above, while supplies last. All participating clinics are listed on the campaign page, mass.gov/GetBoosted.

Tailored communications

A statewide digital and social media campaign launched in late October focused on the updated boosters. Television and cable ads in English and Spanish will launch in mid-November. All municipalities with participating clinics also receive customized media outreach to publicize clinics in local press outlets. In VEI communities, a tailored media buy includes small billboards, convenience store ads, outdoor posters and digital displays in public venues, and digital and social media ads directing people to clinics near them.

VEI partners, including community-based organizations and sister state agencies, are promoting vaccinations and the availability of the fall clinics. An [online toolkit with assets in multiple languages](#) has been created to facilitate communication.

VEI MUNICIPALITY VACCINATION DATA

The VEI publishes the latest vaccination data weekly on an interactive dashboard, available at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-vaccine-equity-initiative-community-specific-vaccination-data# covid-19-vaccine-equity-initiative-data-dashboard>. The data are publicly available and stratify vaccination rates across sex, age, and race/ethnicity for each of the 20 VEI communities, as well as statewide.

Please note: The next report to the Legislature will be submitted in January 2023 and will include results of the first two months of the Fall COVID-19 Vaccine Initiative. It will also outline the work and impact of the Vaccine Equity Initiative since its launch in February 2021.