

Philadelphia COVID-19 Response Plan

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Executive Summary

In the past 19 months, more than 3,800 Philadelphians have died from COVID-19. Black and Latino Philadelphians have borne a disproportionate burden of deaths and hospitalizations due to the impact of historic and present-day racism that has led to higher rates of chronic conditions and less access to jobs that allowed remote work among these groups. The Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH), together with partners across the city, is working to address these disparities through a combination of strategies that prioritize a data-driven, equity focused approach to the pandemic. We have made significant progress in the past 6 months at improving the equity of vaccine distribution, but still have much more work to do. This plan lays out our strategies for next steps in protecting all Philadelphians against the pandemic with particular focus on those populations at highest risk due to the added burden of systemic racism. It must be clearly stated that far more needs to be done to address racism as a public health problem beyond COVID-19. This work is just a beginning.

Since vaccine first arrived in Philadelphia in December 2020, more than 2 million doses have been administered in the City. As of October 7, 86% of Philadelphia residents (age 18+) have received at least 1 dose, and 70% (age 18+) are fully vaccinated. Disparities in vaccination rates have been closed for those age 45 and over but remain for younger adults and teens. Despite these significant strides, COVID-19 cases began to increase in August 2021, with Black city residents once again at highest risk, a clear indicator that Philadelphia must continue to be vigilant in monitoring and responding to COVID-19 surges as the vaccination effort progresses. This plan summarizes the City's layered approach to protecting residents at high risk of severe COVID-19 disease through a combination of strategies, including vaccination, masking, testing, isolation and quarantine, policy implementation and enforcement, community education and outreach, and continuous program monitoring and evaluation. This ongoing work will integrate a health equity framework, data-driven decision-making, and community perspectives. Key strategies include the following:

- Vaccination is our most effective tool for ending the pandemic. The City has built a network of over 350 COVID-19 vaccine providers and has maintained a vaccination program that anchors COVID-19 vaccination clinics in community-based settings in neighborhoods with lower vaccination rates and fewer vaccine providers. To ensure equitable access to vaccine, the City will continue to operate clinics in neighborhoods with low vaccination rates, as well as in settings that serve populations who have a high risk of exposure or are at risk for severe disease.
- Masks provide an additional layer of protection for persons who are at high risk of exposure and/or severe COVID-19 infection. The City will continue to mandate universal masking in schools, prisons, shelters, skilled nursing facilities, healthcare, and other settings that pose an increased risk of transmission, as well as in all indoor public settings.

Philadelphia Covid-19 Vaccine Distribution Plan

- To create widespread access to low barrier testing, PDPH expanded testing opportunities in areas of high need through the COVID-19 Community Testing Program and the operation of two mobile testing units. To further expand testing, PDPH will open COVID-19 Testing Resource Hubs in fall 2021 that will offer free rapid testing. PDPH is also planning for the delivery of rapid at-home test kits to households in need of testing.
- Isolation of people who have COVID-19 and quarantine of people who have been exposed to the virus are effective interventions to curb transmission. However, it may be difficult for some residents to adhere to isolation and quarantine recommendations due to economic, housing, and other limiting factors. To ensure that residents can safely isolate or quarantine for the appropriate length of time, the City offers free hotel rooms, as well as a variety of at-home support services.
- The City will continue to develop, implement, and enforce focused policies, such as vaccine mandates, that protect people who are at higher risk for COVID-19 exposure or severe disease due to working or living in high-risk settings, or underlying medical conditions.
- Outreach and education are critical to ensuring ongoing community participation in Philadelphia's effort to end the pandemic. The City will continue to conduct community canvassing and outreach events and utilize mass communications strategies to ensure that important COVID-related information about vaccination, testing, masking, and other containment measures is accurate, timely, and accessible to all residents. The City is also committed to aligning outreach strategies across departments so that the various programs conducting outreach activities can operate with greater synergy.
- The City will rely on data, as well as community voices, to evaluate programmatic outcomes, guide resource allocations, and make course corrections when necessary.

We are grateful to the many community partners who have contributed their ideas and feedback to improve our pandemic response including the members of the Vaccine Advisory Committee (now combined with the Racial Equity Response Team), the Chief Medical Officers of our local hospitals, who meet regularly with the Acting Health Commissioner to share strategies and ideas, and to the many community leaders and individuals without whom this work would not be possible.

Introduction

Nineteen months after the first cases of COVID-19 occurred in Philadelphia, there has been significant progress in containing the pandemic through a combination of disease control strategies, including social distancing, masking, testing, case investigation and contact tracing, isolation and quarantine, and vaccination. As vaccination rates increased in Philadelphia, COVID-19 cases, emergency department visits, hospital admissions, and deaths decreased. While 70% of Philadelphia adults have now been fully vaccinated, cases began to increase again in August 2021, in part due to the Delta variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which is more infectious, spreads more easily, and is causing more disease in susceptible groups, including children under 12 years of age who are not yet eligible for vaccination. The vaccination of all eligible individuals is critical to protecting the residents of Philadelphia who are most at risk for severe disease, as well as those who are at risk for exposure due to occupational and institutional settings. While working toward that goal, the City will continue to implement a layered approach to COVID-19 containment that protects persons who are most at risk. This plan outlines the City's core response strategies for the current phase of the pandemic, which are guided by the following principles:

- 1.** The Health Department's mission is to protect persons who are at high risk of acquiring COVID-19 infection and/or are at high risk of severe disease.
- 2.** A health equity lens must be applied to all facets of the COVID-19 response to ensure that vaccination services, containment strategies, distribution of resources, and policy decisions advance equity.
- 3.** A data-driven approach is integral to the development, implementation, and evaluation of all COVID-19 response actions.
- 4.** Policies should prioritize the protection of persons who are at highest risk of COVID-19 infection and/or severe disease.
- 5.** Resources should be directed where they are most needed and can have the greatest impact on ending the pandemic.
- 6.** The long-term goal of the Health Department is to plan and collaborate with partners to develop a sustainable model for provision of COVID-related services, including expansion of COVID-19 vaccination and testing in various healthcare delivery systems.

To maximize protection of our residents who are most at-risk, the City will implement the following response strategies:

1. Ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccination and continue to build a sustainable network of COVID-19 vaccine providers.
2. Promote masking to protect people who are at risk for COVID-19 due to institutional or occupational exposures and other public exposures.
3. Ensure equitable access to testing services to quickly identify COVID-19 cases and clusters of disease.
4. Provide support services to people with limited resources who test positive or are identified through contact tracing so that they can safely isolate or quarantine.
5. Implement and enforce policies that prevent spread of infection and protect people who work or live in high-risk settings.
6. Conduct education and outreach to ensure ongoing community awareness of and active participation in the City's response to COVID-19.
7. Use data to continuously inform, evaluate, and refine the City's response strategies.

This plan describes each of the response strategies outlined above in greater detail and highlights actions that individuals, organizations, and the community can take to protect themselves and others. This layered approach will be particularly important as we continue to grapple with surges in COVID-19 cases while trying to maintain routine societal functions with only minimal restrictions and closures.

Health Equity Approach

Throughout the pandemic, we have seen many instances of the ways in which historic and present-day racial and ethnic inequities and social determinants of health have worsened outcomes. Early in the pandemic, overall death rates for African Americans in Philadelphia were 50% higher than those for Whites, and Hispanics/Latinos/Latinx people over age 75 had the highest death rates per 10,000 population in the city. Significant racial disparities were also seen in vaccination rates in the first several months following the vaccine rollout. While some of these inequities have improved over time, achieving ongoing equity in the response to COVID-19 requires intentional strategies to reach populations in the city who face a higher risk of serious disease and death from COVID-19 and who are likely to face significant barriers to vaccination, testing, and other services. This includes Black and Brown people as well as people living in congregate facilities, people who are homebound, people living with disabilities, and immigrants/those with limited English proficiency.

High-risk Populations and Settings

The Health Department is focused on identifying and protecting persons who are at higher risk for severe disease or who work or live in settings that present a higher risk of exposure. Older adults (65+) and people with [certain underlying medical conditions](#) are more likely to get severely ill from COVID-19. In addition, many ethnic and racial minority groups and people with disabilities are at increased risk of morbidity and mortality from COVID-19 due to long-standing systemic health and social inequities.

Congregate facilities, such as long-term care facilities, prisons, shelters, and residential psychiatric and rehab facilities, pose a high risk because they place a large number of people, often including many with risk factors for severe illness, together with staff members who come and go from the facility, potentially bringing asymptomatic COVID-19 infection. Long-term care facilities pose a particularly high risk due to the combination of older, medically fragile residents and congregate living conditions.

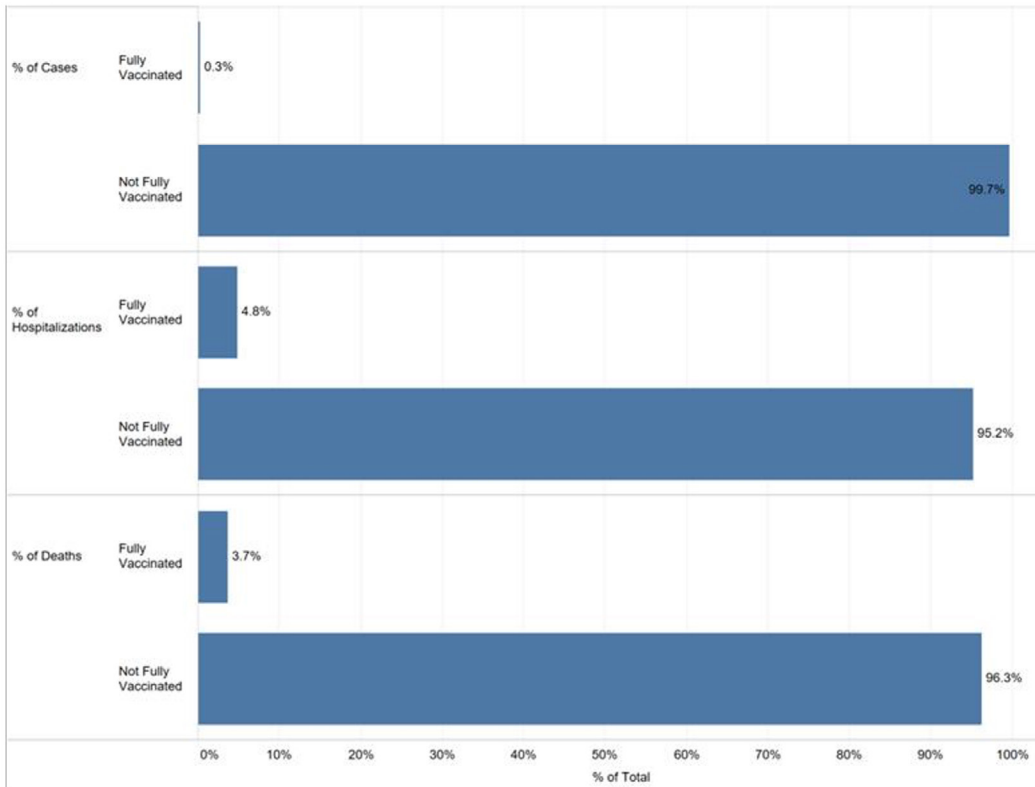
With the return to school in fall 2021, the school setting now also poses a risk for COVID-19 transmission since COVID-19 vaccine is not yet approved for children under 12, and not all students age 12 and older have been fully vaccinated yet.

While many persons who are at high risk for severe disease and persons living and working in congregate settings have been vaccinated, there is ongoing risk of exposure and illness as long as they continue to come into contact with unvaccinated persons. **More complete protection of older adults, persons who have underlying medical conditions, and persons living and working in high-risk settings can be achieved through a layered approach that combines vaccination with masking, testing, isolation of sick persons, and quarantine of exposed persons.** The effects of these containment strategies are amplified when they are further advanced through community education and outreach initiatives and policies that promote protection of at-risk persons and reduction of community transmission.

Strategy 1: Provide equitable access to vaccine and continue to build a sustainable network of COVID-19 vaccine providers

Vaccination is both safe and effective in preventing COVID-19 infection. While breakthrough cases have occurred, serious illness only happens in a small portion of fully vaccinated people.

Vaccination Status of Cases Since 1/15/2021



Philadelphia Covid-19 Vaccine Distribution Plan

Although 86% of adults in Philadelphia have now received one dose of COVID-19 vaccine and 70% are fully vaccinated, additional work is needed to: 1) increase vaccination rates in low vaccination neighborhoods and among high-risk populations; 2) provide additional doses to persons who are moderately or severely immunocompromised; and 3) provide booster doses per the [recommendations](#) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

To achieve sustainable and equitable COVID-19 vaccine access across the city, the Health Department has built a broad vaccine administration network, largely comprised of healthcare providers, along with numerous community partners, with a focus on trusted providers of both testing and vaccination services. Currently, 357 sites are enrolled as COVID-19 vaccine providers, including:

- Hospitals/health systems
- Pharmacies
- Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and other outpatient clinics
- Primary care and pediatric providers
- Organization-based providers (including the Philadelphia Department of Prisons Health Services, the Philadelphia Fire Department—Emergency Medical Services, etc.)

To expand the number of community-based vaccination providers, the City partnered with the Philadelphia Mental Health Care Corporation (PMHCC) to offer funding for vaccination services through a COVID-19 Community Vaccination Program Request for Proposals (RFP). Nine organizations funded through this program are regularly operating community-based vaccination clinics:

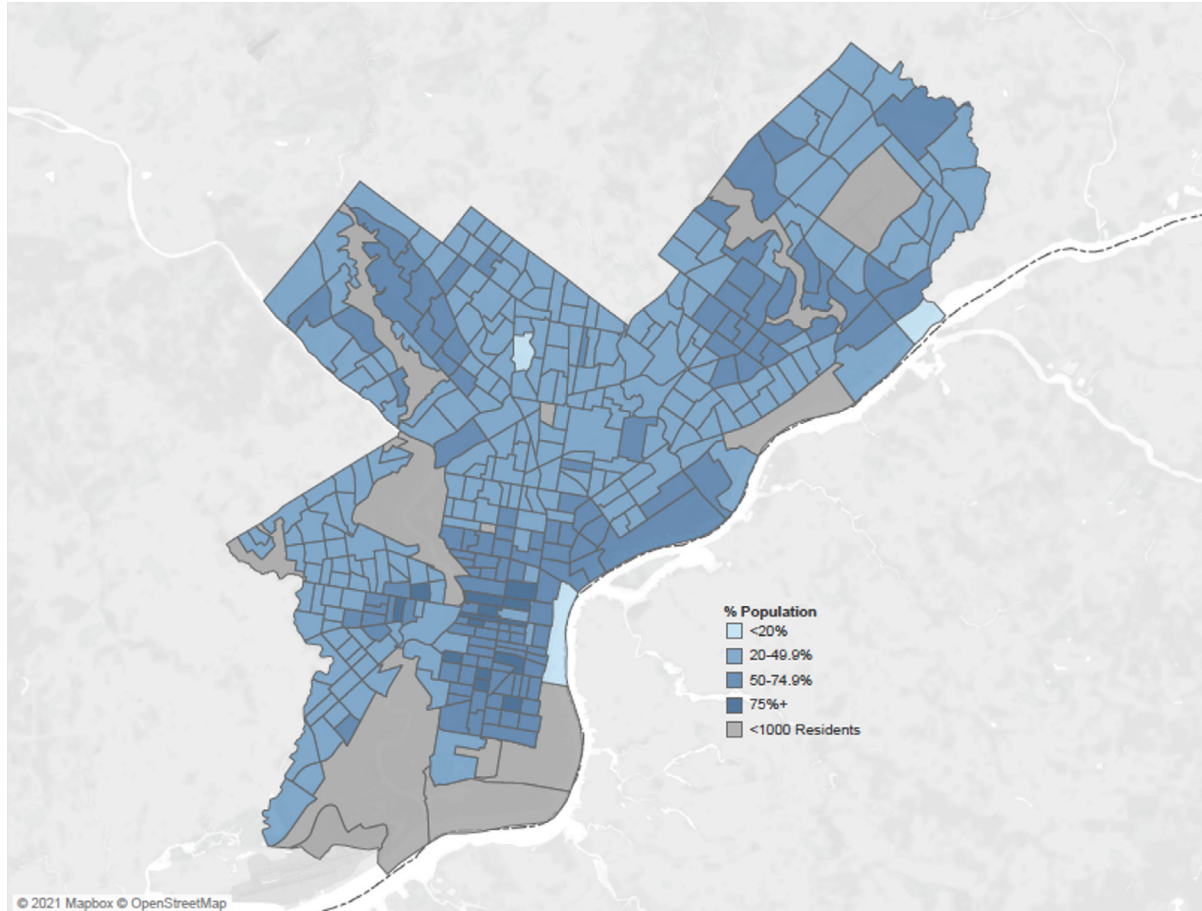
- Albert Einstein Medical Center
- Black Doctors COVID-19 Consortium
- CityLife Health
- Congreso de Latinos Unidos, Inc.
- Penn Medicine
- Puentes de Salud
- Temple University, Katz School of Medicine
- Temple College of Public Health
- Thomas Jefferson University Hospital

Philadelphia Covid-19 Vaccine Distribution Plan

The City's vaccination strategy has shifted from a mass vaccination approach to a localized, tailored approach that pairs vaccination services with outreach efforts to successfully engage persons who have not yet been vaccinated and makes vaccination convenient and accessible in low vaccination areas of the City. We have utilized a data-driven intentional strategy to address the initial disparities in vaccination rates seen among Black and Latino city residents. This strategy has helped to address these disparities, particularly among people 45 and over, but differences remain among younger city residents. The City continues to prioritize the operation of clinics and availability of vaccine in areas with lower vaccination rates, which are predominantly Black and Brown communities, in collaboration with trusted community-based organizations. The Health Department's ongoing COVID-19 vaccination mission is twofold:

1. To address gaps in COVID-19 vaccine access and equity by allocating City resources, including both vaccination services and outreach efforts, to neighborhoods, communities, and populations that are under-resourced, such as low vaccination census tracts, populations at higher risk for severe disease, and communities that may have difficulty accessing vaccination due to poverty, transportation, language, or other social determinants.
2. To work with providers, including hospitals and health systems, pharmacies, Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and other outpatient clinics, and community providers funded through the COVID-19 Community Vaccination Program Request for Proposals (RFP), to provide equitable, accessible, and convenient opportunities for COVID-19 vaccination throughout the City and to build a long-term, sustainable network for COVID-19 vaccination services.

Percent of Total Population Receiving At Least 1 Dose by Census Tract



BOOSTERS

On September 24, 2021, the CDC approved COVID-19 vaccine booster shots for persons who have completed their initial series of Pfizer vaccine at least 6 months ago and are:

- 65 years and older
- Age 18+ who live in [long-term care settings](#)
- Age 18+ who have [underlying medical conditions](#)
- Age 18+ who work in [high-risk settings](#)
- Age 18+ who live in [high-risk settings](#)

While these groups are all eligible for boosters, **the CDC recommends booster doses for persons aged 65 and older, residents of long-term care facilities, and persons aged 50-64 with underlying medical conditions.** A booster dose will help strengthen protection in populations who are at high-risk for severe disease.

The vaccine landscape has changed dramatically since Philadelphia entered Phase 2 distribution in April 2021. Given that vaccine supply is now ample and that there are over 350 enrolled COVID-19 vaccine providers in Philadelphia, it is expected that boosters will be widely available through pharmacies, outpatient clinics, and other providers. PDPH's focus will be on continuing to ensure equitable vaccine access by addressing gaps and allocating resources to areas of high need, rather than operating large-scale clinics that duplicate the services currently available through other providers. Early data indicate a disproportionate number of breakthrough cases resulting in hospitalization for African Americans, further underscoring the importance of boosters for African Americans, particularly those age 50 and older with underlying medical conditions, as well as those who work in frontline occupations. To address ongoing gaps in vaccine access and equity and to ensure a broad and sustainable network for COVID-19 vaccination, PDPH will implement the following actions:

- ***The City will maintain COVID-19 community vaccination clinics to provide boosters to eligible persons.*** PDPH and the Philadelphia Fire Department (PFD) have been operating community vaccination clinics since February 2021. Community clinics will continue to operate in low vaccination neighborhoods to offer first, second, third, and booster doses (per CDC's recommendations). Hours will include some evenings and weekends to maximize access. Information about City-operated COVID-19 vaccination clinics is available [here](#).
- ***PDPH will resume mobile team operations to provide boosters to high-risk persons.*** In December 2020, PDPH began deploying mobile teams to vaccinate healthcare staff on-site at large facilities not affiliated with a health system, such as inpatient behavioral health facilities. In the spring, mobile teams transitioned to offer vaccinations to both staff and clients in other congregate settings, such as group homes, shelters, and recovery centers. PDPH will conduct outreach to sites previously visited to determine the need for additional doses and/or boosters for staff and residents. One mobile team has continued to deploy to shelters, as well as McPherson Square, to ensure vaccine access for persons experiencing homelessness. This team will continue to focus its efforts on persons experiencing homelessness, while a second team will focus on providing boosters to eligible persons in other congregate settings.

- ***PDPH will coordinate with long-term care facilities to ensure that they have mechanisms in place to provider booster doses to their residents.*** PDPH has recently surveyed long-term care facilities to validate their plans for providing booster doses to residents and will continue to follow up with any facilities that need to be connected to a vaccine provider.

ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO VACCINATION

- ***The City will continue to operate pop-up and microsite clinics in lower vaccination areas of the city in collaboration with partners.*** PDPH and PFD have been offering pop-up clinics in collaboration with a variety of community and faith-based partners since Philadelphia entered Phase 2 in April 2021. PDPH is currently operating 10 microsite clinics each week at Free Library branches and City recreation centers. Microsites are small, recurring clinics that are hosted in familiar community sites in collaboration with partners. In making resource allocation decisions, PDPH will review vaccination rates at the census tract level to further refine clinic locations. While ZIP code level data are helpful in detecting larger trends, census tract data are also useful in identifying neighborhoods that would most benefit from microsite and pop-up clinics.

- ***PDPH will collaborate with other providers to maintain a sustainable network for COVID-19 vaccination services.*** PDPH will work with other providers throughout the City to continue to build a broad network of COVID-19 vaccine providers. To find nearby vaccination opportunities, visit: <https://www.vaccines.gov/>. PDPH will also continue to work with the nine community vaccine providers funded through the RFP to ensure that community vaccination needs and gaps are met.

PDPH will coordinate with other COVID-19 vaccine providers to connect organizations interested in hosting vaccination clinics with providers that have the capacity to provide pop-up clinics. Organizations seeking a vaccine clinic can complete the [Vaccine Provider Partnership Survey](#) to be matched with a provider.

- ***PDPH will continue to address barriers to vaccination by providing transportation resources and interpretation services, as well as addressing other access and functional needs, at PDPH-operated clinics.*** To date, 42,500 transit passes have been given to 18,150 people at vaccination clinics, and SEPTA CCT has provided 2,252 rides. All City-run vaccination sites have been assessed for their accessibility and modified as needed. Mobility devices, sensory toolkits, and communication assistance services are available at all City-operated clinics. The City has recently updated its [Accessibility at Community Clinics](#) blog with information about accessibility at microsite clinics. PDPH is also partnering with the Mayor's Commission for People with Disabilities to receive input on response activities and provide guidance and access updates during monthly stakeholder meetings.
- ***PDPH will expand the homebound program.*** In May 2021, PDPH created a registry and referral program to schedule in-home vaccination services through a network of providers for people who are homebound, as well as their caregivers and families. Since the program's inception, 1,089 referrals have been made to providers. To enroll in the registry, homebound persons or their caretakers can call 311, the COVID-19 Call Center at (215) 685-5488 (dial 711 for TRS/TTY assistance), or complete this online [form](#). PDPH is currently seeking to expand and sustain the current homebound program through RFP-funded providers that are able and willing to deliver homebound vaccinations.

PEDIATRIC VACCINES

- In anticipation of FDA approvals for administration of COVID-19 vaccine to children age 5–11, PDPH is continuing recruitment efforts to enroll pediatric and primary care practices as COVID-19 providers. PDPH has been working with providers in the Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program to encourage enrollment as COVID-19 vaccine providers. Approximately 60% of VFC sites are currently enrolled as COVID-19 vaccine providers. The goal is to increase this enrollment to 70% by the end of October.
- ***PDPH will continue to offer walk-up vaccinations at City-operated Health Centers.*** The following locations offer walk-up vaccination on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 8:00am to 1:30pm:

- Health Center 3 Annex (4219 Chester Ave., 19104)
- Health Center 5 Berks Street Annex (2001 W. Berks St., 19121)
- Health Center 6 Annex (301 W. Girard Ave., 19123—entrance is on 3rd St.)
- Health Center 10, East Side Courtyard entrance (2230 Cottman Ave., 19149)

PDPH Health Centers currently offer COVID-19 vaccination to adults and children ages 12 and older and are preparing to expand vaccination services for children age 5-11 pending the approval of Pfizer vaccine for pediatric patients.

Strategy 2: Promote masking to protect people who are at risk for COVID-19 due to institutional or occupational exposures and other public exposures.

While being fully vaccinated is the best way to protect against serious complications from COVID-19, **masks have been proven to reduce the risk that unvaccinated and vaccinated people will be infected with the virus.** On August 12, 2021, the City of Philadelphia instituted a new mask mandate, in response to the rise in cases across the United States, which has been largely attributed to the Delta variant. Although Philadelphia has not seen the same spike in cases, the City instituted its mask mandate to prevent similar increases of infection and protect Philadelphians who are at higher risk of serious complications from COVID-19 and residents who have not yet been vaccinated, particularly children under 12 years.

- ***PDPH will continue to mandate masking in settings where spread of COVID-19 is more likely to occur.*** Data indicate that COVID-19 is most easily spread indoors and if outdoors more likely to spread in large crowds. In Philadelphia, **businesses and institutions that require vaccination for all employees and patrons are exempted from having a mask requirement.** Masks are required indoors at all Philadelphia businesses and institutions that do not require vaccination for all employees and patrons. That means that for businesses and institutions that do not require everyone who enters to be vaccinated, everyone on site is required to wear a mask. Essential businesses, like grocery stores, pharmacies, doctors' offices, and urgent cares, are not allowed to utilize the vaccinated only exception to the mask mandate and must require masks for all staff and patrons. Masks are also required at all non-seated outdoor events in Philadelphia with more than 1,000 attendees, regardless of vaccination status.

- ***PDPH will continue to mandate and enforce masking in settings of highest risk to protect people who attend, live or work in those facilities.*** Masking is mandated in settings, such as in schools, long-term care facilities, and congregate settings, to protect people who are at risk for COVID-19 due to institutional or occupational exposures. Universal masking should be enforced, and [double masking](#) encouraged for people who are not yet vaccinated or are at high risk.

Strategy 3: Ensure equitable access to testing services to quickly identify COVID-19 cases and clusters of disease

Finding opportunities for COVID-19 testing was very challenging at the start of the pandemic, and it often took too long for test results to be returned. The majority of testing sites had numerous stringent requirements, such as restrictions on age and types of symptoms, need for an appointment or prior telehealth visit, and upfront costs. To address and reduce these barriers preventing or hindering people from being tested, PDPH has implemented a variety of strategies to increase COVID-19 testing access across the city, particularly in areas with limited testing options and with higher-risk populations. However, with the increase in demand for testing due to both increased cases and testing requirements, we anticipate challenges with testing capacity to recur in fall 2021.

- ***PDPH will continue to fund organizations to operate low barrier community testing locations through the COVID-19 Community Testing Program Request for Proposals (RFP).*** To meet the varied needs of different communities, these sites utilize many different models to offer testing in areas of the city that have limited testing access and high rates of COVID-19 infection. This has included collaborating with local community-based organizations in underserved neighborhoods and expanding the staffing capacity and hours of operation at trusted testing locations already in operation. As of October 2021, 13 organizations are funded and operating 29 different testing locations across Philadelphia. [Use the COVID-19 testing map to find testing locations.](#)
- ***PDPH will continue to operate two mobile testing units stationed in areas of highest need in partnership with local organizations.*** In partnership with Aardvark Mobile Tours, PDPH operates two mobile testing units (MTU) Tuesday-Saturday in areas of the city that have the highest rates of COVID-19 infection and limited testing access. Every month, each MTU is at a different location each day, but at the same location each day of the week (i.e., at the same location every Tuesday in a month), to create a consistent testing option for the community. PDPH collaborates with community- and faith-based organizations, as well as City agencies like Philadelphia Parks & Recreation and the Free Library of Philadelphia, to host the vehicle. Through these partnerships, PDPH works with the host organization to advertise the testing services among the community and provides flexible options to meet each specific community's needs. [View the schedule for the MTUs and other pop-up testing events.](#)
- ***PDPH will continue to coordinate and support outbreak responses in high-risk settings.*** Currently, most PDPH testing support is provided to non-healthcare congregate living facilities (e.g., shelters, recovery homes, small personal care homes, etc.) that lack clinical staff and/or are unlikely to have contracts in place with a commercial laboratory. For facilities with no clinical staff, PDPH teams conduct onsite testing clinics in response to a case(s). For facilities with clinical staff, PDPH provides testing supplies and courier services for transporting specimens to the PDPH Public Health Laboratory (PHL) for testing. Additionally, PDPH provides testing supplies (e.g., swabs, rapid antigen tests, etc.) and testing services to the Philadelphia Department of Prisons (PDP). Along with outbreak response testing and testing of symptomatic inmates for case identification, PDP conducts weekly testing of unvaccinated staff and movement-based screening of inmates (at intake, before transfer, and before visits into the community).

In addition, the MTU has been used to effectively host outbreak response testing events for individuals at a variety of high-risk settings, including independent senior living facilities, schools, and universities. These testing activities allow for a coordinated testing event at impacted facilities, providing a convenient and free opportunity for individuals to be tested, and greatly increases accessibility to testing services for persons in congregate living facilities, who may have transportation or mobility challenges.

- ***To expand testing capacity, PDPH will open brick-and-mortar COVID-19 Testing Resource Hubs at trusted community locations to increase access to rapid testing and linkage to supports.*** These Resource Hubs will be housed at local community- and faith-based organizations and independently operated by PDPH staff to **offer rapid, point-of-care COVID-19 testing for free with no appointment necessary.** These sites will also conduct onsite case investigations to elicit close contacts of people who test positive and connect them with isolation and quarantine services and other social supports and resources. Resource Hubs will be located in highly trafficked commercial corridors in areas of higher social vulnerability ([CDC Social Vulnerability Index](#)) and with limited consistent rapid testing options (i.e., at least a half mile from another site). All Resource Hubs will be open at least six days per week. Hours will vary between locations to meet the neighborhood's needs but will be open for at least seven hours per day and accommodate for early morning or evening times. The first COVID-19 Testing Resource Hub is anticipated to be piloted in October 2021 in West Philadelphia, with more locations anticipated this winter. Organizations interested in learning more about the COVID-19 Testing Resource Hubs and partnering with PDPH can email covid@phila.gov.
- ***PDPH will expand its at-home testing initiative to supply households with confirmed exposures test kits and offer them in non-traditional settings.*** To supplement the community testing locations, PDPH has piloted the **delivery of at-home PCR test kits to households of cases identified through case investigation interviews for the testing of their close contacts.** At-home testing allows for people who were exposed to a confirmed case or have symptoms of COVID-19 to fully adhere to their isolation periods and avoid leaving their homes to seek testing. This method of testing may also be beneficial for individuals who face barriers leaving their homes, such as mobility and transportation challenges, having close household contacts who are at high risk of serious COVID-19 complications, and other logistical concerns. When interviewed by PDPH staff, individuals are given the option to have at-home PCR test kits delivered to their homes, which they must mail back to a lab for processing. However, for the faster turnaround of results, PDPH plans to begin sending free rapid antigen cards to contacts, as well as giving them away in non-traditional settings, such as through community- and faith-based organizations and at grocery stores and other frequently visited locations.

Strategy 4: Provide support services to people with limited resources who test positive for COVID-19 or are identified through contact tracing so that they can safely isolate or quarantine.

When Philadelphians test positive, their results are communicated to PDPH and cases are assigned to PDPH case investigators and contact tracers, in order to learn where someone may have gotten infected and to alert their close contacts that they should quarantine and seek testing. Recently, participation in case investigation and contact tracing has declined compared to the early phase of the pandemic (i.e., 70% participation vs 45% participation) emphasizing the need for layered approaches to reduce risk. [Philadelphians are encouraged to trace and notify their close contacts if they test positive.](#)

Isolation and quarantine (I&Q) are measures to help protect the public by preventing exposure to people who have or may have COVID-19. Isolation separates people who have COVID-19 from people who do not. Quarantine separates people who were exposed to someone with COVID-19, such as contacts of a confirmed case, to prevent them from passing the infection to others if they become sick. One of the challenges for those exposed and/or infected with COVID-19 is being able to effectively separate from others in their household and making sure individuals remain separated for the appropriate length of time. Whether living with family, high-risk individuals, in group settings, or alone, there are various obstacles that can impact the ability of a person to follow isolation or quarantine instructions.

- ***PDPH will continue to offer free lodging for Philadelphia residents to isolate and quarantine away from others.***

To support Philadelphians, the City of Philadelphia has operated I&Q facilities for residents since the pandemic began in March 2020. Currently, through the [Bounce Back Philly](#) program, **PDPH offers a free, safe, and comfortable room in a private Center City hotel to any resident who cannot safely separate from others.** Every Philadelphian is eligible to stay at the I&Q hotel, regardless of immigration status. When a Philadelphian tests positive for COVID-19 or is exposed to someone with the virus and has nowhere to stay or safely isolate, they may be referred through PDPH staff during their case investigation interview or call the I&Q hotel to request temporary housing. If the I&Q hotel is determined via a screening process to be the best option for the person, free transportation is arranged to the hotel. Every person receives three meals a day, snacks, WiFi, cable TV, and other services, as well as access to telehealth and behavioral health support. Families may also be accommodated at the hotel with larger or adjoining rooms. [Take a tour of the I&Q hotel and learn more.](#)

- ***PDPH will bolster its ability to ensure the provision of necessary services and supports to Philadelphians at home, to fully adhere to their isolation or quarantine periods.*** For Philadelphians who are able to isolate or quarantine at home but need help doing so, PDPH offers a variety of **in-home support services.** Residents who test COVID-19 positive are offered supports when interviewed by PDPH staff. Currently, PDPH is providing food and grocery delivery to households, and plans to offer laundry services and prescription medication delivery in the coming months. For other services and supports, PDPH staff will work to refer and connect residents with the appropriate agency or organization that may be able to help. Residents who test positive may also request a care package be sent to their home, containing items such as: KN95 and surgical masks, hand sanitizer, thermometers, and other materials.

Strategy 5: Implement and enforce policies that prevent spread of infection and protect people who work or live in high-risk settings

COVID-19 policies and guidance have been instrumental in containing the pandemic and preventing hospitalizations and deaths. As vaccination coverage increased and cases decreased, the City's Safer at Home orders and restrictions, which were powerful tools in protecting the public, were scaled back. However, as case counts began to increase again and new more transmissible COVID-19 variants circulated, the City enacted new mandates in summer 2021 to curb the virus' spread and protect people who are at high risk for serious infection, as well as children under age 12 who are not yet eligible for vaccination.

- ***PDPH will uphold and enforce its mandates that all healthcare workers, as well as staff, students, and faculty at colleges and universities, in Philadelphia be required to be vaccinated against COVID-19, except for those with religious or medical exemptions.*** These mandates take effect on October 15, 2021 for hospitals, long-term care facilities, and colleges and universities, and on October 22nd for all other healthcare workers. Healthcare settings,

including long-term care facilities and nursing homes, present a particular increased risk for spreading COVID-19 to patients who may develop serious infection. Previous waves of the pandemic have also demonstrated how quickly this virus can spread through college campuses and then into the surrounding communities. These vaccine mandates, along with the masking mandate described previously, will be critical in protecting the highest risk Philadelphians and preventing rampant spread in certain settings. PDPH will enforce these mandates through review of vaccination records and will impose fines on organizations that fail to comply. [Learn more about these vaccine mandates.](#)

- ***PDPH will continue to issue and revise regulations and guidance as needed to reduce community transmission.***

The City strives to enact COVID-19 regulations that are based on the best available current evidence. Vaccines and masking are our most effective tools to curb transmission and have less economic impact on Philadelphians than capacity limits and closures. The City will formally implement these tools in broad or tailored ways to maximize benefit while minimizing societal disruptions. As the pandemic has caused or worsened economic hardships, interruptions to schooling and education, emotional and psychosocial trauma, and crime and safety concerns, among other issues, the City will continue to balance COVID-19 restrictions with other issues that affect residents, while prioritizing the protection of individuals at highest risk.

- ***PDPH will ensure that policies and guidance are clearly communicated to the public and business owners***

through a variety of channels. Upon the announcement of new restrictions at City press conferences, the Health Commissioner will answer questions and provide clarification as needed. A summary of the updated policies will also be published on the [City's website](#) to outline any new requirements with details on their implementation. [Guidance documents](#) are updated to reflect the new changes and are available for a number of different settings and in a variety of languages. To ensure that business owners are able to voice their considerations and fully understand new policies, the City often convenes stakeholder groups to discuss any major changes. When policies are adopted, PDPH will send teams to canvass commercial corridors to provide businesses with helpful posters and educational materials and allow for in-person discussion on how the new policies may be implemented in their establishment. PDPH also hosts virtual information sessions available to the public to review guidance and answer questions.

Strategy 6: Conduct education and outreach to ensure ongoing community awareness of and active participation in the City's response to COVID-19

PDPH outreach efforts focus on improving vaccine coverage rates by implementing initiatives that are strategic and driven by data, while considering equity, cultural norms, and prioritizing high-risk populations. Over the past six months, PDPH has expanded and bolstered its outreach initiatives in collaboration with numerous community partners to further engage with populations that have had limited vaccination opportunities or may not be confident yet in the safety of the vaccine. These initiatives have included the launch of Philly Counts trainings of community leaders for citywide canvassing and provision of information sessions for various audiences. The City will continue to conduct community education and outreach activities in order to build vaccine confidence and to encourage continuation of practices that protect high-risk persons, such as masking.

Effective messengers are community leaders and peers of people who reside in and are respected by the communities PDPH is trying to reach. PDPH has partnered with Philly Counts and the Mayor's Office of Public Engagement to identify trusted messengers and assist them in providing information on the vaccine and the City's effort to make vaccines available to their communities. To further build vaccine confidence and address community questions and concerns about COVID-19, PDPH plans to expand upon its community engagement initiative through the following activities:

- ***PDPH will expand COVID-19 mobile Information Desks.*** PDPH has been operating mobile "Info Desks" in high-traffic pedestrian areas and at community events to answer questions about vaccine, assist community members in finding vaccination and testing opportunities, and provide other COVID-related resources. Info Desks are staffed by PDPH personnel who speak a variety of languages and reflect the diversity of Philadelphia. PDPH will expand "Info Desks" in collaboration with partners in low vaccination neighborhoods to ensure that the most current information about vaccination, testing, and other COVID topics is easily accessible. Sites currently operating or identified for future Info Desks include older adult centers, transportation centers, food distribution sites, and other locations that are close to vaccination clinics. PDPH has participated in over 100 events in 2021 thus far.
- ***PDPH will continue its partnership with Philly Counts to align neighborhood outreach activities with vaccination and testing services.*** PDPH has developed a targeted outreach strategy for each vaccination microsite and is working with Philly Counts to implement various activities, including meeting with trusted community messengers to promote vaccination services, neighborhood canvassing, and other outreach activities, to generate interest among unvaccinated persons and provide information about boosters to already vaccinated persons.
- ***PDPH will continue to convene and participate in virtual town halls with trusted messengers and community leaders to provide them with opportunities to learn about select COVID-19 topics, ask questions, and hear directly from Health Department experts.*** Topics are informed by feedback collected from community partners, and have included: COVID-19 vaccine access, testing, isolation and quarantine services, pediatric vaccinations, the Delta variant, and COVID-19 misinformation. Sessions are recorded, captioned, and have live American Sign Language (ASL), Spanish, Russian, Arabic, French, and Mandarin interpretation, and feature a Q&A.
- ***PDPH will continue to share COVID-19 information and educational resources to community leaders.*** PDPH sends a monthly newsletter to community members and partners with highlights of current COVID-19 response activities, opportunities for testing and vaccination, guidance updates, and organizational spotlights. Partners and organizations located in neighborhoods that are served by PDPH community clinics and microsites also receive targeted vaccine resource information via email with multilingual clinic flyers. PDPH will continue to engage leaders in under-vaccinated areas to learn about optimal clinic promotion. [Sign up for the COVID-19 Containment Newsletter.](#)

Strategy 7: Use data to continuously inform, evaluate, and refine the City's response strategies

The City is committed to implementing a data-driven approach to guide the response to the pandemic. Transparent and regular sharing of data is also integral to keeping the public informed. Since the spring of 2020, the City's website on the COVID-19 pandemic response at www.phila.gov/covid has included information on the coronavirus, how it is spreading in Philadelphia, the latest data on the pandemic, and the City's response, including Health Department activities like testing, contact tracing, and vaccination. The [vaccine distribution dashboard](#) is currently updated 5 days per week.

PDPH collects quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate its operations and assess the needs of Philadelphia residents through surveys, focus groups, and meetings with stakeholders. Feedback is also collected during vaccination clinics and outreach events through targeted conversations with the public and community leaders. Feedback gathered through these channels is then incorporated into operations led and supported by PDPH, such as testing initiatives, isolation and quarantine services, and vaccination services. PDPH regularly solicits and acts upon feedback from partners to improve operations and meet the needs of diverse communities.

In the last 19 months, we have learned to anticipate racial and ethnic disparities in every phase of the response, and more importantly, to put plans into place to prevent them, including partnering collaborating with trusted community leaders and organizations and regularly monitoring data to identify any areas of our response that need course correction. That process is built into this updated response plan, which will be continuously monitored through the next phase of the pandemic and modified as needed.

- ***PDPH will regularly review census tract level data to adjust planning, resources, and services as needed.*** Because of the geographic disparities in the city, planning and resources have been redirected to focus on areas where vaccination rates remain static or are not increasing as rapidly. Likewise, case rates and testing data will be used to inform decision-making about how best to allocate testing resources, such as the Mobile Testing Unit and testing supplies.
- ***PDPH will continue to collect and utilize racial and ethnic data points to identify disparities and allocate City resources to promote equity in the response to COVID-19.***
- ***As the vaccine mandate for healthcare workers kicks in, the City will regularly collect data to monitor compliance in achieving a 100% vaccination rate among all healthcare workers who are not exempt due to medical or religious reasons.***
- ***PDPH will continue to collect and publish data to keep Philadelphia residents up to date on the current status of the pandemic.*** Data will be shared via the City's website, as well as through more digestible formats, such as infographics.

Conclusions

The City of Philadelphia's response to COVID-19 continues to evolve to keep pace with the changing course of the pandemic. We are grateful to the many partners across the city who have helped to contain the virus, to achieve high vaccination rates, and to decrease disparities. We are also grateful to the many community leaders who have shared their wisdom on how best to reach communities that have experienced historic and present-day discrimination and whose trust in public health and in healthcare institutions needs to be earned. To effectively contain the virus, PDPH has promoted widespread access to testing services, conducted thousands of case investigation and contact tracing interviews, and provided isolation and quarantine support services open to all Philadelphia residents. When vaccines became available, the City and provider community mobilized to administer over 2 million vaccine doses in nine months, effectively reducing the spread of the virus and preventing hospitalizations and deaths. Policies and restrictions, like mask and vaccine mandates, have recently been implemented to reduce the risk of transmission and serious COVID-19 infection, with the goal of protecting people who are at high risk of infection and/or of severe disease. Engaging the diverse, unique communities of Philadelphia continues to be a high priority to guide decision-making, advance health equity, inform the development and implementation of response strategies, and identify neighborhoods where resources are needed most and can have the greatest impact on ending the pandemic. In the coming months, the Health Department will continue to build upon strategies that have been effective in reducing transmission and protecting people who are at high-risk for severe disease. While significant strides have been made, the pandemic is not yet over and ongoing monitoring and recalibration of strategies will be essential as we prepare for a potential winter surge.