

## COVID-19 mobile vaccination units project extended after success through the summer

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The state today announced the extension of the COVID-19 mobile vaccination unit project that aims to reduce barriers and help increase equitable access to vaccination. The success and popularity of the units over the spring and summer has prompted the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) to keep some buses in service.

From April through August, six mobile vaccination units administered over 7,200 doses of COVID-19 vaccine during 170 unique clinics in 42 counties across the state.

Two of the mobile vaccination units will remain in use through MDH's community vaccination program. The program is also looking into ways to use the buses to provide other routine vaccines in the future. Communities or organizations can get more information about requesting a vaccination event on the MDH website: [Host a Community COVID-19 Vaccination Event](#).

"We are excited to see that communities are using this resource, and we are thrilled to continue serving Minnesotans with this unique program," said Minnesota Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm. "Vaccination is vital to stopping the spread of COVID-19, and every Minnesotan deserves access to life-saving vaccines. Working toward equitable COVID-19 vaccination rates has been at the core of our work, and the mobile vaccination units have helped fill a gap in being able to bring vaccines directly to people who might not otherwise have the chance to get vaccinated."

The mobile units allow for more equitable distribution of vaccines by prioritizing vulnerable and underserved communities. Focus communities for the mobile units include people of color, urban Native Americans, LGBTQI+, people with disabilities and unique health needs, people living in isolation, and people experiencing homelessness.

Clinic locations that serve people living in ZIP codes with a higher social vulnerability index (SVI) are prioritized. Over the spring and summer, 70% of mobile clinics were offered in quartile 1 or 2 SVI ZIP codes – those with the highest disadvantage. By race/ethnicity, Minnesotans

receiving vaccines on board the buses identified as white (34%), Latinx (28%), Asian/Pacific Islander (16%), Black (12%), Native American (1%), Middle Eastern/North African (1%) or undisclosed (8%).

The success of the initial phase of the mobile vaccination units was made possible by working with 115 community partners who hosted mobile vaccination clinics and helped promote the vaccination opportunity to their communities. Based on post-event surveys, 94% of community partners reported that the mobile vaccination units provided COVID-19 vaccines to people who otherwise would not have had access. These community partnerships will remain a core element of the program going forward.

“Our mobile vaccination clinics have been successful in all types of communities because of our committed community partners who identified barriers and gaps in vaccine access, requested the mobile clinics and led outreach efforts,” said Dr. Nathan Chomilo, MDH COVID-19 equity director. “Communities that have been disproportionately affected by this pandemic have long endured other systemic inequities, so it has been our mission to find effective ways to improve access to vaccination and information —the mobile units have been critical in getting us closer to that goal.”

The mobile vaccination unit project is a joint effort between MDH and partners like Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota and Metro Transit. Blue Cross volunteers staffed the buses to administer vaccines. Metro Transit retrofitted the buses to become mobile clinics and their bus operators drove the buses.

“Our involvement stemmed from wanting to make sure people who didn’t have easy access to a vaccine could get one,” says AJ McDougall, senior vice president of strategy, innovation and external affairs at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. “Blue Cross is committed to breaking down whatever barriers stand in the way of keeping all of our communities safe and healthy. Every shot administered by our volunteers administered over the past five months has helped to better protect Minnesota against the risks of COVID-19.”

The partnership with Blue Cross concluded on Aug. 31. During the 20-week initiative, 375 volunteers from Blue Cross and its parent company staffed more than 1,000 clinical and non-clinical positions on the buses. In addition, 38 community clinicians volunteered on the buses

through Minnesota Doctors for Health Equity, a statewide coalition of physicians and other health professionals working toward health equity for all Minnesotans.

MDH continues to work with hundreds of vaccine providers across the state – from pharmacies, clinics, local health departments and other community clinics – to make COVID-19 vaccines as convenient and accessible as possible. The buses will also continue to augment the state's robust network of vaccination clinics set up by COVID Community Coordinators and pop-up community vaccination clinics aimed at reaching high-risk populations.