

Commissioner Malcolm thanks health care providers and partners one year into administering COVID-19 vaccines

As part of the state's Celebrate Safely campaign and marking the one-year anniversary of the first COVID-19 vaccine doses being administered in the state, Commissioner Jan Malcolm hosted an event at Children's Minnesota thanking Minnesota health care providers and partners who have worked tirelessly to vaccinate Minnesotans against COVID-19.

Throughout the first year of COVID-19 vaccination, over 8.3 million total vaccine doses have been administered resulting in over 66% of Minnesotans 5 and older completing their vaccination series so far. Efforts by providers and other partners have made Minnesota a consistent leader in vaccinations in nearly every metric in the Midwest over the past year.

According to the CDC, Minnesota leads in the Midwest in the percentage of total population fully vaccinated and the percentage of people age 18 and older that are fully vaccinated.

Minnesota is second in the country for total population with a booster dose, and leads the nation in the 65-and-older population with a booster dose.

Nearly 30% of children 5 to 11 years old have gotten at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose since becoming eligible last month, making Minnesota a leader in the Midwest and the nation for vaccinating that age group.

"We want to thank all of the providers and partners who have helped us efficiently and equitably make sure Minnesotans can get their COVID-19 vaccine – we would not be able to do this without you," said Department of Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm. "We also recognize that this pandemic is not over. Today our partners reminded us of how critical it is for people to get vaccinated, get boosted, and use other known prevention strategies to slow the spread and prevent further hospitalizations and deaths from this virus."

Commissioner Malcolm was joined by a group of providers and partners representing doctors, nurses, pharmacists, local public health, and community partners. Together the providers shared their personal testimony serving on the frontlines this past year and made an urgent plea for Minnesotans to do their part to help relieve the health care systems across our state.

Children's Minnesota Vice President and Chief of General Pediatrics Dr. Gigi Chawla said, "We've come a long way in a year from vaccinating health care workers, to adults, to now doing what we do best in pediatrics, vaccinating and protecting kids. We have collaborated across previous silos of health systems, public health, schools and private sectors to support COVID vaccinations. But, there is much more work to be done. As the kid experts, Children's Minnesota urges everyone to remain vigilant against COVID-19 and, if eligible, get vaccinated."

St. Paul Infectious Disease Associates Infectious Disease Specialist Dr. Peter Bornstein said, "After successive waves of ever more transmissible virus, and people who remain unvaccinated, the hospitals where I work alongside the most compassionate and dedicated people you will ever meet, are filled beyond the brim. It doesn't have to be like this. If you have been vaccinated—thank you. Please get a booster. If you have not been vaccinated, it is not too late. Please get vaccinated. Please don't be a statistic in our hospital."

Black Nurses Rock Twin Cities President and CEO Kelly Robinson said, "The vaccine is simply a means of protection. If you refuse the vaccine, at least wear a good mask. You cannot walk around unvaccinated and unmasked. That is totally irresponsible. To be totally irresponsible and end up in our care is asking a bit much of nurses and doctors. It's been too long and we are tired!"

Park Nicollet Chairperson of Pediatrics Dr. Andrea Singh said, "The discussions around COVID vaccine have been really complicated. As a parent, sometimes it's hard to know what the right thing to do is to protect my own kid's futures. As a pediatrician, parents will often ask me if their kids should get vaccinated against a virus that seems to hit adults hardest. The answer is 'yes.' Doing so helps protect them against a dangerous virus and reduces the chances they'll spread the virus to more vulnerable people like parents and grandparents. When it comes to infectious diseases, we're all connected. The more we can protect everyone – including kids – the better off we'll be."

HealthPartners Infectious Disease Doctor Omobosola Akinsete said, "I am a black woman, an immigrant from Nigeria West Africa, a mother of two children and an infectious disease physician. I have been at the forefront on the COVID-19 pandemic from the beginning. I have seen many people including those who look like you and me lose their lives due to COVID-19 infection. Please believe me when I say COVID-19 is real. I hope you and your loved ones get

vaccinated against this dangerous virus as soon as possible and that you have a happy new year in 2022.”

Saint Paul-Ramsey County Public Health Director Sara Hollie said, “Our health care providers and public health haven’t given up on us, we can’t give up on them or each other. We’re doing our part in local public health, vaccinating thousands of residents each month, helping to answer questions and concerns and providing accurate information about COVID-19. The best way we can honor the work of everyone in health care and public health, and avoid a fifth wave of COVID-19 in our community, is to get vaccinated or a booster, continue to wear masks, gather safely and get tested. Don’t give up. Let’s all do our part.”

Minnesota Board of Pharmacy Executive Director Executive Director Cody Wiberg said, “The mission of the Minnesota Board of Pharmacy is to promote, preserve, and protect the public health, safety, and welfare by fostering the safe distribution of pharmaceuticals and the provision of quality pharmaceutical care to the citizens of Minnesota. In keeping with our mission, we would not recommend the vaccines if we were not convinced that they are safe and effective. By getting vaccinated, Minnesotans can also protect the health of others – including health care workers such as pharmacists, who are putting their own health at risk in order to serve patients and end this pandemic.”

Community Pharmacy Enhanced Services Network Minnesota Executive Director Lindsay Christensen, PharmD said, “Throughout the pandemic, local community-based pharmacies have kept their doors open, provided curbside services and home delivery for patient’s ongoing health care needs. Their commitment to patients did not waver throughout the rollout and ongoing vaccination efforts. Your community pharmacist is one of the most accessible health care providers and they will continue to be a part of the local solution, through vaccination efforts, COVID-19 testing and accessibility to medications for the treatment of COVID-19, in hopes of reducing hospitalizations and deaths.”

Homeland Health Specialists, Inc.’s Director of Clinical Operations Tracy Howard, MSN, RN, PHN, and Nurse Manager KaLee Medina, BSN, RN said, “Nurses know lives can be saved with a simple vaccination. We are frustrated by the misinformation and devastated by the loss of life that we see daily. We are exhausted and overwhelmed. Please give back to nurses by getting vaccinated and requesting others to get vaccinated.”

The “Celebrate Safely, Minnesota” campaign, is a coordinated, statewide effort to help Minnesotans access the resources they need to celebrate as safely as they can this holiday season. In addition to testing and vaccine events, the campaign will provide Minnesotans with information as to where they can get their test, vaccine, or booster and promote why each step is critical to help prevent the spread of COVID-19—especially amidst the presence of the Delta variant and uncertainties surrounding the Omicron variant.