Baltimore Convention Center Field Hospital Launches Pilot Program To Vaccinate Most Vulnerable Populations

New Program Focuses on Equitable COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation for At-Risk Communities

ANNAPOLIS, MD—The Baltimore Convention Center Field Hospital (BCCFH), a public-private partnership of the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), University of Maryland Medical System (UMMS), and Johns Hopkins Medicine (JHM), will be piloting a unique approach designed to improve equitable allocation of COVID-19 vaccine and expand its emphasis on vaccinating the most vulnerable communities in Baltimore.

“This innovative program gives us another powerful tool to reach vulnerable communities with safe and effective vaccines,” said Acting MDH Secretary Dennis Schrader. “This is an all-hands-on-deck undertaking, and I want to thank our partners for their commitment to ensuring equitable access to vaccines.”

“This pilot is a demonstration of the commitment to get the equity equation right—the state, our local partners, and the community finding the answer together,” said Brigadier General Janeen Birckhead of the Maryland National Guard and head of the state’s equity task force. “It’s one more step in the right direction to ensure equitable distribution of the vaccine. We must do all we can to make the vaccine available in our most vulnerable communities.”

As the first mass vaccination center in Baltimore, BCCFH has been focused on developing proactive and adaptable approaches to expanding access to COVID-19 vaccines among communities in Baltimore where vaccine uptake is lagging. BCCFH leadership has worked closely with hospital-based community health teams to actively encourage eligible individuals who live in high-vulnerability ZIP codes to register for vaccination. Using a custom algorithm, the BCCFH has worked to ensure that over 40% of recipients eligible for vaccination at BCCFH were Baltimore City residents, prioritizing individuals in vulnerable communities first.

As the M&T Bank Stadium Mass Vaccination Site has now opened, the BCCFH will, using a phased approach, expand this mission of focusing principally on people who live in high vulnerability ZIP codes in Baltimore City. The expanded strategy will include four components:

- Appointment prioritization by Baltimore City ZIP codes that represent underserved populations
- Aggressive community engagement to reach at-risk populations
- Continued refinement of technology tools to reach specific populations
- In collaboration with partners, increase public efforts to enhance vaccine acceptance

Moving forward, BCCFH will prioritize vaccine recipients from historically underserved communities in Baltimore City and will seek to fill as many appointments as possible with residents of these areas. It is anticipated this expanded emphasis will take several weeks to fully operationalize as staff expand outreach efforts into communities to drive awareness and participation in this new pilot project.

CEO of UMMS. “With a second mass vaccination site now open in Baltimore City at M&T Bank Stadium, it is the perfect opportunity to redouble those efforts and engage with local communities.”

“We are making progress in reaching the most vulnerable members of our community, but there is more that we can accomplish,” said Kevin W. Sowers, MSN, RN, FAAN, president of Johns Hopkins Health System. “We also strive to provide the information needed for all members of our community to make science-based decisions when it comes to getting vaccinated.”

The efforts of UMMS and JHM community health workers will be instrumental. Under the new approach, additional staff will be hired and expanded teams will initially concentrate efforts in six priority ZIP codes in Baltimore City. These teams will work with community leaders and individual residents to overcome the principal obstacles that have contributed to low vaccine uptake in these areas: the digital divide, access to transportation, and dispelling vaccine misinformation and myths.

Within each community, these teams will provide information about the safety and efficacy of the vaccine to help overcome issues of uncertainty about getting the vaccine and will work closely with faith and other trusted community leaders to encourage participation. Teams will also work closely with residents to ensure they have transportation to and from the BCCFH, utilizing ride-sharing and other community based transportation assets. Staff will help individuals sign up online or over the phone for vaccinations, working with leaders and individuals who have been excluded from vaccination due to lack of internet access. Finally, continuous monitoring of these efforts, making adjustments as needed, will ensure equal access to the COVID-19 vaccine for all Baltimore City residents.

Individuals in vulnerable communities without digital access and in need of assistance registering for a vaccine appointment at BCCFH can call (443) 462-5511 from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday to schedule an appointment. This line will connect individuals with someone who can assist with entering their information. Patients can register for an appointment at the BCCFH vaccination site online at www.umms.org/BCCvaccine.

To find other vaccine sites near you, visit covidlink.maryland.gov for more information on Maryland’s response to COVID-19. Vaccine and other coronavirus data are available at coronavirus.maryland.gov.

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