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Missouri launches new statewide transportation resource guide to expand COVID-19 vaccine access to rural, suburban and urban communities across the state

"Get a Ride" is a comprehensive resource of transportation platforms across each region

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JEFFERSON CITY, MO – The Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS), with the support of the **Missouri Advisory Committee on Equitable COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution (https://covidvaccine.mo.gov/equity/)**, launched a new statewide transportation guide to help address and eliminate barriers to COVID-19 vaccine access. "**Get a Ride**" can be found at **MOStopsCovid.com/ride (http://www.MOStopsCovid.com/ride)**.

The Missouri Advisory Committee on Equitable COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution, which was formed in 2020 to work directly with and engage the DHSS' external partners and stakeholders, is proud to share this new resource with Missourians, vaccinators, providers and other key stakeholders. This guide is the result of efforts made to increase access to free and low-cost transportation resources across Missouri's rural, suburban and urban communities to administer the COVID-19 vaccine.

"In Missouri, we recognize there is a significant amount of older adults, people with disabilities and low-income individuals who are at higher risk of contracting the virus and don't have cars, don't drive, don't live near public transit and live in rural areas far from vaccination sites," said **Missouri Advisory Committee on Equitable COVID Vaccine Distribution Co-Chair Sara Hart Weir**. "Throughout our **Missouri Advisory Committee on Equitable COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution (https://covidvaccine.mo.gov/equity/)** meetings and discussions, access to affordable transportation kept coming up as a barrier to achieve equitable vaccine access. The goal of "Get a Ride" is to provide a comprehensive resource for Missourians to access free transportations in your local community to receive your COVID-19 vaccine."

"Get a Ride" is now embedded throughout every aspect of the state's COVID-19 vaccine rollout infrastructure including the state's COVID-19 hotline, **MOstopsCovid.com (http://www.MOStopsCovid.com)**, and

through Missouri's Regional Implementation Teams. The resources can be customized by location (region and county) for each vaccine event and site.

Some providers, such as OATS and SMTS who normally serve older adults and individuals with disabilities are now able to help anyone in their service area with vaccination transportation.

"OATS is happy to be able to provide transportation to vaccination sites for individuals living in rural areas," said **Dorothy Yeager, OATS Transit Executive Director**. "Since the first of March, OATS has provided over 480 trips to vaccination sites and the demand continues to grow. OATS looks forward to everyone getting fully vaccinated so that we can get back to normal. OATS will continue to provide this service in the rural communities where they have available vehicles and drivers."

Ginny Smith, SMTS' Director of Operations, added, "As the nation continues to recover from COVID-19, SMTS stays committed to helping Missourians as vaccines become available. Transportation should be the last worry when scheduling your appointment for your COVID-19 vaccine. Please contact your local SMTS location and let us assist you. Together, we all will continue to recover 'Show Me Strong.'"

In addition to serving those with disabilities and those over age 60, the Area Agencies on Aging have received funding to also assist caregivers of older adults to help them get to their vaccine appointments.

"Missouri Association of Area Agencies on Aging, ma4, indicates a key impediment to independence is access to transportation. Missouri's Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) service every county in Missouri and provide reliable transportation, over 879,000 rides in 2020, for all of life's needs to ensure older adults and individuals with disabilities have access to transportation," said **Ann McGruder, Executive Director, Missouri Association of Area Agencies on Aging**.

Most of the transportation providers are able to provide this service at no cost. HealthTran is offering reduced costs to their participants who book through them for transportation to a vaccine appointment.

"The Missouri Rural Health Association is dedicated to helping our rural communities understand transportation options to increase access to healthcare in their areas, and find sustainable solutions to barriers they encounter. **MRHA's HealthTran program (https://healthtranrides.org/)** is staffed to be able to work with communities to assess their current transportation options, while helping link community partners to resources that enhance their ability to increase transportation options to improve the health outcomes of their community," said **Melissa VanDyne, Missouri Rural Health Association's Executive Director**.

Lyft and Uber are not free or discounted in Missouri. Additional transportation options will be added to **MOStopsCovid.com/ride (http://www.MOStopsCovid.com/ride)** as they become available.

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