



Photo credit: DOHMH

Covid-19 Vaccine Distribution

Agency: **Vaccine Command Center**

Context

The New York City Vaccine Command Center (VCC) launched in December 2020 to coordinate COVID-19 vaccine policies and distribution with a targeted focus on equitable and rapid delivery across the five boroughs. The City especially focused on 33 neighborhoods identified as priorities by the City's Taskforce on Racial Inclusion & Equity (TRIE). These neighborhoods were chosen based on a range of factors including high COVID-19 mortality and case rates, high prevalence of chronic illness, presence of overcrowded housing, the number of individuals experiencing poverty, and other preexisting health disparities. Working to improve both access to the vaccine and education about its efficacy and safety, the VCC established a fleet of mobile and traveling vaccination teams that can visit more than 100 unique sites each week, created an in-home vaccination program that is open to any New Yorker eligible for the vaccine, and utilized a network of trusted community messengers to supplement government outreach efforts.

Response

The VCC has been dedicated to ensuring that every New Yorker, regardless of age, race, religion, sex, or physical ability has safe, free and easy access to the vaccine of their choice. The VCC worked with New York City Emergency Management (NYCEM), Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), and Health and Hospitals (H+H) to establish and manage over 1,200 fixed and mobile vaccination sites through October 31, 2021, resulting in at least 90% of residents in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens having a vaccination site within a half mile of their home. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the City also worked to ensure that vaccines are available to New Yorkers in their own homes, and to ensure that homebound New Yorkers, disabled New Yorkers and seniors have access to the resources they need during the crisis. The At-Home Vaccination Program launched in March 2021 and has served more than 20,000 individuals. Through innovative partnerships, the VCC facilitated over 12,200 free rides to and from vaccine appointments, administered over 42,000 in-home shots, offered for \$100 per person upon completion of an individual's first dose to encourage vaccine uptake, and created a program where community organizations, small business, or civic groups were incentivized to refer people to get vaccinated in exchange for \$100 per referral since October 31, 2021. Further, the VCC conducted door knocking, street canvassing, robocalls, direct calls, texts, and NotifyNYC alerts. This work was bolstered by an extensive paid media campaign totaling over \$100M in 2021 (digital, streaming, out-of-home, TV, radio, newspapers, etc.), including in-language promotions through October 2021.

Results

From January 1 through October 31, 2021, the VCC created innovative strategies to break down access barriers to the vaccine and educate New Yorkers to achieve the following:

Vaccine access (approx.):

- 12 million doses administered
- 6 million NYC residents vaccinated
- 370,000 mobile program shots
- 303,300 incentives claimed
- 42,000 in-home shots
- 40,600 booster shots
- 12,200 assisted rides
- 1,200 mobile, pop-up, and long-term sites

Outreach and Education (approx.):

- 45.2M emails sent
- 10.6 million conversations held
- 8.8 million calls made
- 4.1 million mailers sent
- 1.7 million doors knocked
- 1.5 million texts sent

- 7,800 events held (4,300 offered in-language)

A July 2021 analysis — undertaken with partners at Yale University and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), supported by the Commonwealth Fund — estimated that the City’s vaccination campaign prevented an estimated 250,000 COVID-19 cases, 44,000 hospitalizations and 8,300 deaths related to COVID-19 through July 1, 2021.¹ This is likely a conservative estimate of total averted outcomes before the delta variant.

Beneficiary Stories

Currently, 6 million New Yorkers and their families have benefitted from vaccination to significantly reduce the risk of hospitalization and death from COVID-19. The City highlighted some of these voices through the “Community Testimonials” campaign, a few examples of which are linked below:

- English: [Semone from Brooklyn](#), [DOHMH Staff](#), [Leana from Brooklyn](#), [Compilation](#)
- Spanish: [Ursula from Brooklyn](#), [Did it for Mom](#), [Keep Strong](#), [Compilation 1](#), [Compilation 2](#)
- Mandarin: [Compilation](#)

Next Steps

On October 12, 2021, the Citizens Budget Commission (CBC) announced the Vaccine Command Center as the winner of its annual Prize for Public Service Excellence, which honors creative solutions that have positive impacts on New Yorkers’ lives, this year with a special focus on initiatives that responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and recession.² The work of the Vaccine Command Center continues as vaccination mandates, guidelines for booster shots, and eligibility expand. Upon authorization from the federal government, the VCC will manage the administration of vaccines for 5-11 year old New Yorkers (the most recent eligibility group). Beginning in early November, the City is working closely with the NYC Department of Education (DOE) to kick off a school based vaccination plan with the goal of bringing mobile vaccine units to over 1,000 public elementary schools across the City.

¹ Shoukat, A.; Vilches, T. N.; Moghadas, S.; Sah, P.; Schneider, E.C.; Shaff, J.; Zucker, J.; Quinn, C.; Chokshi, D. A.; Galvani, A.P. (2021) Lives saved and hospitalizations averted by COVID-19 vaccination in New York City. *medRxiv* 2021.07.14.21260481; <https://doi.org/10.1101/2021.07.14.21260481>

² Citizen’s Budget Commission. (2021) CBC Awards Prize for Public Service Excellence to NYC’s Vaccine Command Center. <https://cbcnyc.org/newsroom/cbc-awards-prize-public-service-excellence-nycs-vaccine-command-center>