Best Practices for COVID-19 Vaccination and Testing:

Initial Learnings from an Environmental Scan

As part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' efforts to combat COVID-19, prioritize health equity, and prepare for future pandemics, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health are working with Mathematica to conduct a study of testing and vaccination policies and programs for people who are medically or socially at disproportionate risk for COVID-19 or adverse outcomes.

This document summarizes findings from an HHS environmental scan report, developed by Mathematica, on common barriers to COVID-19 vaccination and testing services and routine vaccinations, as well as strategies to help people overcome those barriers. The report also provides a list of 266 examples of COVID-19 vaccination and testing programs.

Barriers to COVID-19 Vaccination and Testing Services

Many barriers to COVID-19 vaccination and testing services are not unique to COVID-19, and are rooted in historical and ongoing structural racism, economic inequality, and inequitable access to social and health care resources. Pandemic-related disruptions made these barriers harder to overcome.

Awareness and confidence barriers	Access barriers	Pandemic-related disruptions
• Misinformation • Difficulty accessing online resources • Language barriers • Distrust in the health care system	• Transportation to and location of services • Employment inflexibilities • Perceived costs • Legal risks	• Social and economic effects on families • Delays in receiving health services • Local/state stay-at-home orders

Overcoming Barriers to COVID-19 Vaccination and Testing Services

To increase access to COVID-19 vaccination and testing services, programs offered vaccination and testing in multiple venues, such as:

Mass clinics or events	Community clinics	Health care settings	Mobile clinics	Residential homes

Common delivery strategies used to increase awareness of, confidence in, and access to testing and vaccination included:

- Partnering with community-based organizations and trusted community leaders

- Employing multilingual staff

- Using culturally appropriate, translated messages

- Expanding hours and walk-up options

- Limiting identification/documentation requirements, when possible

- Communicating using multiple channels: print, radio, TV, social media, phone calls, text messages, in-person outreach

- Pairing testing and vaccination with other services, such as health care or food assistance

Implications for the Future

The environmental scan report is a first step in developing findings that will be useful to organizations working in the field, funders, and policymakers. As part of the ongoing Best Practices for COVID-19 Vaccination and Testing study, ASPE, OASH, and Mathematica will use findings from the report and unanswered questions to shape a national survey of local organizations and a series of site visits to states, tribal organizations, and the programs working within them. Guided by a panel of subject-matter and community experts, the goal of the project is to identify promising practices for reducing testing and vaccine inequities and inform efforts to prepare for future pandemics.

The full environmental scan report is available at https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/best-practices-covid-19.

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