

COVID-19 Vaccine Ride Assistance Initiative

Overview for Transit Agencies and Vaccine Providers

January 20, 2021

Overview

A tested, safe, and effective COVID-19 vaccine will be available to all North Carolinians who want it, but supplies will be limited at first. Our goal is to vaccinate as many people as quickly as possible given the limited supply. The NC Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the NC Department of Transportation (DOT) want to make sure that no barriers, including lack of transportation, prevent someone from getting vaccinated.

Towards that goal, DHHS and DOT are distributing Coronavirus Relief Funds to local transit agencies to provide access to and from COVID-19 vaccine sites for North Carolina residents. Anybody who is traveling to or from a North Carolina vaccine provider is eligible for transportation for the purpose of receiving a COVID-19 vaccine or assisting someone who is receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

Starting tomorrow, we will encourage people who need transportation to or from a vaccine site to reach out to their local transit agency.

This document explains expectations for how local transit agencies and vaccine providers can coordinate and work together to help North Carolinians with transportation barriers get the COVID-19 vaccine.

Thank you for all that you are doing to lead and support this critical work!

Expectations of local transportation agencies

A. Coordinating with vaccine providers

- a. Agencies need to regularly monitor the list of vaccine providers at <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/findyourspot> to understand what local health departments, hospitals, and other entities in their footprint are currently providing vaccine.
- b. Reach out to each vaccine provider in your area for key details that impact transportation:
 - i. Who is eligible to get a vaccine at that site?
 - ii. What are their days and hours of operation?
 - iii. Are they doing scheduled appointments or a show-up-and-wait drive thru?
 - iv. If they are doing show-up-and-wait, will they do an “express lane” for vehicles providing transportation assistance?
- c. Be in regular communication with the vaccine providers in your area to understand changing/evolving situations and any opportunities for process improvement.
- d. Designate a primary and secondary contact plus direct phone numbers for easy access, inquiry and coordination by vaccination providers.

B. Scheduling vaccine rides

- a. Statewide message to general public will be “If you need a ride to get your COVID-19 vaccine, help may be available. Contact your local transportation agency.”
- b. NC residents will reach out to agencies for transportation assistance. The agency is responsible for ensuring that the ride is to/from a vaccine provider.

C. Providing vaccine rides

- a. To the greatest extent possible, rides should be provided in a manner that is consistent with public health guidance: <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/guidance>
 - i. Drivers/passengers should maintain social distance and wear masks whenever possible.
 - ii. Surfaces in vehicles should be cleaned and disinfected regularly.
- b. To the greatest extent possible, transit agencies should provide dedicated on-demand service to/from vaccination sites and avoid grouping vaccination trips with other trip purposes. This will streamline billing, reporting, and help ensure transportation to vaccination sites is effectively prioritized. As a reminder, charter service rules related to transportation to vaccination sites are waived and dedicated service for this purpose is considered an approved incidental use of transit vehicles at this time.
- c. To the greatest extent possible, all fares should be waived for trips to and from vaccination sites.

D. Tracking service delivery and spend

- a. At least every two weeks, agencies need to provide an update to DOT on:
 - i. How many COVID vaccination rides have been delivered to how many individuals
 - ii. How many dollars from their allocation have been spent.
- b. DHHS will provide additional detail on what is needed from a monitoring and compliance perspective either in the new MOA or in a trailing document.

Expectations of vaccine providers

A. Surfacing and connecting individuals with transportation barriers

- a. For vaccine providers scheduling appointments for vaccines, we recommend as a best practice informing anyone who makes an appointment, “if you need a ride, reach out to your local transportation agency” and provide them the contact info.
- b. We recommend that any communications being pushed out by a vaccine provider in the community include messaging: “If you need a ride, call your local transportation agency at X.”

B. Informing local transportation agencies of changes to your operations

- a. Vaccine providers should proactively reach out to local transit agencies to promptly flag any changes that could impact ride assistance. See North Carolina Public Transit Systems map and list of contact information (attached). This includes but is not limited to:
 - i. Addition, subtraction, or change of physical location of vaccine site

- ii. Changes in days or hours of operation
 - iii. Implementing scheduled appointments
 - iv. Changes in phase/eligibility for receiving a vaccine
 - v. When vaccine supply is exhausted and when a new shipment is expected
 - vi. Changes in method of vaccination distribution (scheduled appointments or a show-up-and-wait drive thru)
 - b. Designate a primary and secondary contact and direct phone number for coordination with transit agencies.
 - c. If feasible, explore options for additional coordination with transit agencies (e.g., scheduling transportation at time of scheduling vaccination)
- C. Proactively communicating any best practices, pain points, or opportunities for improvement of vaccine rides both to local transport provide and to DHHS.**
- a. If planning large, open clinics, connect with the transportation agency to coordinate rides from communities aligned with current vaccine phase.
 - b. Provide a carpool or transportation agency expedited lane, if possible.