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One year later, COVID vaccines have protected millions *Unvaccinated population continues to strain resources, spread virus*

LANSING, Mich. – The COVID-19 vaccines made history one year ago today as Michigan began administering the first authorized vaccine, produced by Michigan-based Pfizer, at hospitals across the state. The vaccines were first administered to health care professionals and, since Dec. 14, 2020, more than 6 million Michiganders ages 5 and older have received at least one dose of the vaccine.

“One year ago today marked a pivotal step in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, and in honor of all those we’ve lost to this virus, we must reflect on all of the progress we’ve made since that time,” said Elizabeth Hertel, director of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS). “To vaccinate more than 6 million residents in the span of one year is an incredible feat, and one that brings much promise to a future beyond this pandemic.”

Michigan residents who have yet to be vaccinated and boosted are urged to get vaccinated as soon as possible. The vaccine has protected more than 6 million Michiganders, 200 million Americans, and led to the easing of restrictions and recovery of the economy.

Michigan reached the goal of vaccinating 70% of the population over age 16 on Nov. 15. Since then, Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine authorization has expanded to ages 5 and up, and Michiganders over age 16 are eligible for a booster dose six months after their primary series. However, those who are unvaccinated remain disproportionately affected by COVID-19. In the last 30 days of complete data (Oct 21 - Nov 19), 97,310 (71%) of 137,472 cases, 1,134 (72%) of 1,584 hospitalized cases, and 588 (76%) of 772 deaths were among individuals not fully vaccinated.

“Unfortunately, as well as the vaccines work, too many Michigan residents have yet to be vaccinated and are running a very real risk of becoming hospitalized or dying from COVID,” said Dr. Natasha Bagdasarian, MDHHS chief medical executive. “The strain of the unvaccinated population on our health care system is absolutely a crisis, and the solution is simple: we must continue to vaccinate as many residents as we can.”

[Recent data](#) has shown that three out of four COVID patients are unvaccinated (76%), 87% of COVID ICU patients are unvaccinated and 88% of COVID ventilator patients are unvaccinated. Further, the ongoing weight of COVID-related hospitalizations is stretching Michigan’s health care system beyond its limits. Support from the U.S. Department of Defense has become necessary to support the critical health care staffing crisis facing our hospitals.

“The data is clear; vaccines are safe and effective at preventing severe illness and is our most powerful tool in protecting our health and reducing the strain on our healthcare system,” said Brian Peters, CEO of the Michigan Hospital Association. “Our hospitals encourage everyone to get vaccinated, have your children vaccinated and receive your booster dose when eligible. The

pandemic is clearly not over, and our healthcare workers need your help and support now more than ever.”

The longer the pandemic exists and the virus spreads – primarily in the unvaccinated population – the higher the risk of virus mutations. The COVID-19 Omicron variant is now in Michigan and [preliminary information indicates that this variant is highly transmissible](#) -- posing a serious threat to Michigan’s overburdened health care system.

Residents are advised to get vaccinated, particularly before gathering for the holidays, including getting the booster dose to increase protection, and wear masks particularly indoors and in crowded areas. Other things people can do to protect themselves and their loved ones include:

- Getting tested for COVID-19, especially before gatherings.
- Physically distancing from others and avoiding crowds.
- Washing hands frequently with soap and water, and cleaning hands with alcohol-based hand rub.
- Covering your mouth and nose with a bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Self-isolating until you recover if you develop symptoms or test positive for COVID-19.

MDHHS has issued [a public health advisory](#) that all Michiganders, regardless of vaccination status, should wear a mask in indoor public settings and those who are not fully vaccinated or who are immunocompromised should avoid large crowds or gatherings.

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