

Gov. Pritzker Announces Illinois to Enter Bridge Phase of Reopening Plan on May 14

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CHICAGO – As Illinois continues to outpace national vaccination rates and COVID-19 trends across the state stabilize following recent upticks, Governor Pritzker announced the entire state will move into the Bridge Phase of the Restore Illinois reopening plan beginning Friday, May 14th. The Bridge Phase will allow for expanded capacity limits for businesses and gatherings before the state moves to a full reopening in Phase 5.

Barring any significant reversals in key COVID-19 statewide indicators, Illinois could enter Phase 5 as soon as Friday, June 11th.

The Governor and Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike also announced an expansion of the COVID-19 vaccine administration plan to include private doctors' offices and small medical providers, which can now begin to order and administer COVID-19 vaccine directly to patients. Interested providers can register with the Illinois Comprehensive Automated Immunization Registry Exchange (I-CARE). Thus far, 60% of adult residents have received their first dose, including 85% of residents ages 65 and older. To further expand vaccine accessibility, state-run vaccination sites will now accept walk-ins in addition to pre-booked appointments.

"I'm pleased to announce that the concerning upward movement of cases and hospitalizations we were seeing a few weeks ago have stabilized – a testament to the lifesaving, community-protecting power of vaccinations," **said Governor JB Pritzker**. "As a result, on Friday, May 14th, the State of Illinois will move into the Bridge Phase of our mitigation plan – one step closer to removing nearly all of the remaining mitigations, and a very hopeful move toward fully reopening. I want to thank people across Illinois who are getting vaccinated, wearing their masks, and continuing to do their part to make your friends and family safer and your communities healthier."

"Vaccination is how we can get back to summer camps, swimming lessons, and youth sports; but it is not something the Illinois Department of Public Health can do on its own. We need everyone's help. If you've been vaccinated, talk with your friends and co-workers about getting vaccinated," **said IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike**. "Research shows that health care providers, as well as friends and family, are who most people look to when deciding to get vaccinated. Wear your mask, avoid large crowds, and get your shot."

Over 9.7 million vaccine doses have been administered to Illinois residents in every corner of the state, with millions of those shots taking place at mass vaccination sites, pharmacies, federally qualified health centers, community outreach initiatives, and mobile clinics. With vaccine scarcity no longer the primary barrier to vaccinations, the administration is shifting its program to meet people where they are as much as possible. This effort includes partnering with community organizations to host sites at a location of their choosing, rural and rapid response mobile vaccination teams, and today's announcements expanding to doctors' offices and accepting walk-ins at state-supported sites.

Currently, 1,054 doctors' offices across the state have already registered to administer the COVID-19 vaccine on site, offering their patients a familiar, trusted environment to receive the shot. To begin providing the vaccine, doctors must register with I-CARE to coordinate the ordering of doses.

“Vaccine hesitancy isn’t so much about the science and the logic. It is about emotion and fear and lack of trust. While agreeing with the science, we need to address the fear and lack of trust quietly, confidently and with empathy for those who are hesitant,” **said Dr. Paul Pedersen, Vice President and Chief Medical Officer at OSF St. Joseph Medical Center in Bloomington.** “Among those competent to discuss this empathetically are community physicians. We have a unique relationship with our patients and our communities to be able to help dispel the hesitancy. Arming us with vaccine in our offices will only enhance that capability.”

As the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) approves certain vaccines for younger Illinois residents, including young people ages 12-15, the administration is encouraging pediatric offices to also register with I-CARE. Providers interested in registering with the application should go to the IDPH website and view the enrollment packet: <https://bit.ly/3us02E2>.

“COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on families, particularly Black and Brown families. It's important for family physicians, who have spent years, sometimes over multiple generations, building trust with the families they treat, to encourage and engage with patients and their families to get them vaccinated,” **said Dr. Whitney Lyn of Sengstacke Clinic, Provident Hospital.**

IDPH is coordinating vaccination clinics with religious groups, community organizations, mutual aid programs, neighborhood associations, and other organizations. To host a clinic in your community, sign-up at www.dph.illinois.gov/covid19/vaccinationclinics.

To learn more about the COVID-19 vaccine and find information on other vaccine locations, go to <https://coronavirus.illinois.gov/s/vaccination-location>.