

# **Gov. Pritzker Announces Statewide Campaign to Increase COVID-19 Booster Rates Among Older Illinoisans**

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*State Agencies to Support Skilled Nursing Facilities in Effort to Distribute Boosters to More Residents*

**CHICAGO** – With 1.5 million Illinoisans currently eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccination booster shot and millions more set to become eligible in the coming weeks, Governor JB Pritzker and Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike today announced a statewide effort to increase uptake rates.

IDPH is partnering with the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA), and Illinois Department on Aging (IDoA) to increase education around boosters and provide support to skilled nursing facilities as they work to administer boosters to residents. Currently, Illinois residents 65 or older, anyone 18+ with underlying medical conditions ([listed here](#)) or who work or live in high-risk settings, such as educators and first responders, are eligible to receive a booster shot of the Pfizer vaccine. The CDC is set to review booster recommendations for the Moderna and Johnson and Johnson vaccines on Oct. 20 and 21, with final CDC authorization coming at the end of the week.

“We know that COVID-19 vaccines are life-saving. For our seniors, you’re 29 times more likely to end up in the hospital if you’re unvaccinated. Boosters will extend that life-saving protection,” **said Governor JB Pritzker**. “So let’s do what we can to save lives: roll up your sleeve. Get the COVID-19 vaccine if you haven’t yet – you might just save a life. Get your booster shot – so you can be even better protected. And let’s get out of this pandemic — we can do it by continuing to work together for the common good.”

“We know that advanced age is a significant factor in COVID-19 breakthrough hospitalizations and deaths, but a booster dose can help provide continued protection,” **said IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike**. “While COVID-19 vaccines continue to be effective in reducing the risk of severe disease, hospitalization, and death, scientists and medical experts continue to watch for signs of waning immunity, how well the vaccines protect against variants, and how that data differs across age groups and risk factors. Booster doses recommended for those 65 years and older, and for long-term care residents, can combat waning immunity and help protect those at higher risk of severe illness.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended a booster shot for the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine on September 23rd. Eligible residents who previously received two doses of the Pfizer vaccine can receive a booster shot at a pharmacy, their primary care provider, local health department, and other locations offering Pfizer vaccinations. IDPH is spearheading the administration’s effort to get booster shots into the arms of residents at long-term care facilities, approximately 85% of which administered the Pfizer vaccine to its residents.

As of October 12th, only 18% of Illinois residents aged 65 and older had received a booster. To increase that figure, IDPH is working with staff and administrators at skilled nursing facilities to increase booster rates and identify potential barriers. Using incidents

of large outbreaks and the CDC's [social vulnerability index](#) as a basis for outreach, IDPH is surveying facilities to ensure they have a plan in place to administer booster shots.

If additional assistance is requested, IEMA will mobilize its community partners vaccination program to ensure facilities receive the support they need. In collaboration with local health departments and pharmacy partners, the administration is encouraging all skilled nursing facilities to host an onsite booster clinic by Thanksgiving.

“The Illinois Emergency Management Agency has been a dedicated partner in support of the Illinois Department of Public Health’s initiative to educate the public about the availability and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccine,” **said IEMA Director Alicia Tate-Nadeau**. “The Community Partners program has hosted nearly 4,000 vaccination clinics throughout the state by building trust and increasing accessibility in communities throughout the state.”

In anticipation of the CDC authorizing booster shots for both the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines in the coming days, the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) is preparing to provide booster shots to residents at the state-run veteran’s homes, the majority of whom administered the Moderna vaccine. IDVA has already hosted a Pfizer booster clinic for staff and residents who received the Pfizer vaccine and the department is preparing additional clinics for residents once the CDC recommends boosters for all COVID-19 vaccines.

The Federal Drug Administration’s Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee recently indicated that it may soon offer a recommendation on mix-and-match boosting, an expectation echoed by President Biden’s chief medical advisor, Dr. Anthony Fauci. Data for review includes a [new study](#) from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which is not yet peer-reviewed, on the benefits of using a different booster than the primary series, notably when it comes to adding an mRNA booster shot to the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Vaccination is the key to ending the COVID-19 pandemic. A [new report](#) from the Kaiser Family Foundation indicates that from June through September 2021, approximately 90,000 COVID-19 deaths among adults may have been prevented if they had received the vaccine. To find a vaccination location near you, visit [vaccines.gov](#).