

## Building Momentum to Vaccinate More Wisconsinites

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***Sen. Smith writes about Governor Evers' Administration's ongoing efforts to get more Wisconsinites vaccinated.***

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The COVID-19 pandemic has affected our lives in one way or another now for almost a year. It's been a tough year for so many reasons; we've been disconnected from people in our lives, and sadly many Americans are burdened with grief over the loss of a loved one. In February, we surpassed a grim milestone that many of us never thought was possible just twelve months ago: 500,000 of our fellow Americans are dead from COVID-19.

The staggering number of lives lost to COVID-19 has taken a huge toll on our communities. Here in Wisconsin, we lost more than 6,000 of our neighbors and community members. In contrast to these tragic statistics, the number of vaccines administered thus far provides hope to ending this nightmare.

Last month, Governor Tony Evers announced Wisconsin administered more than one million vaccines since the state began receiving doses in December 2020. The vaccine is a critical tool in our fight against COVID-19. Fortunately, there's been a downward trend in the number of

positive cases, hospitalizations and deaths in Wisconsin since the vaccine became available. Governor Evers' Administration's continued efforts in building statewide partnerships and developing public health infrastructure made this vaccine achievement possible.

Wisconsin is currently one of the top-ranked states for administering COVID-19 vaccines to eligible populations. In fact, [vaccine providers in Wisconsin's western region](#) leads the state's effort to vaccinate the public. More than 50% of Wisconsinites over the age of 65 have been vaccinated. This is incredible progress. As the Federal Drug Administration approves more vaccines and more doses become available, more eligible populations will be able to get vaccinated.

Last week, Governor Evers and the Department of Health Services announced new groups that are eligible to receive the vaccine. On March 1<sup>st</sup>, vaccine eligibility was extended to education and child care staff, some public-facing essential workers, and facility staff and residents in congregate living settings. The groups previously eligible for a vaccine – including frontline health care personnel, long-term care facility residents and adults sixty-five and older – will still be prioritized over this new group.

Now that more populations are becoming eligible to receive the vaccine, [DHS launched a COVID-19 scheduling website](#)

on March 1<sup>st</sup>

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This website will update residents for knowing when and where they can get vaccinated and how to schedule an appointment.

Last week, Governor Evers made an exciting announcement about the launch of four new community vaccination clinics in the state. Currently Wisconsin has one community vaccination clinic in Rock County to help get shots in people's arms as quickly as possible. The new community vaccination clinics will be located in La Crosse, Racine, and Marathon Counties, with the last clinic split between Douglas and Barron Counties. These clinics are expected to open within the next two months.



We're all anxious to return to our normal lives; it may be frustrating when vaccines aren't immediately available for everyone. It's never easy to wait for something so life-changing, like the COVID-19 vaccine. But the only way to ensure safe and proper distribution is through an organized effort like we're seeing. Imagine the chaos if it wasn't organized. After all, the goal of vaccinating a nation is immense when you consider the manufacturing, distribution and scheduling of appointments for over 300 million citizens.

When you become eligible, make an appointment. I'm over the age of sixty-five and am scheduled to receive my second shot. But I know life will still not be back to normal until we reach herd immunity. We must still wear masks and follow other public health precautions so we limit our risk of infection and prevent the spread to others. Momentum is building and more vaccines are coming.

Sometimes it takes a calamity, like this pandemic, to make us stronger and pull us together. I appreciate all of you even more. I'll be so happy to be close once again when we're all safer thanks to the diligent work of the scientists and frontline healthcare workers who have come through for all of us.

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