

Becoming a COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Site

Now that distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine is underway, many non-medical organizations have offered to help increase access and timeliness for those in need. While there's a strong desire to help, these same organizations should also consider the complexities and additional risk inherent to medical-related work. This article will briefly summarize some requirements and considerations for becoming a COVID-19 vaccine distribution site.



The federal COVID-19 Vaccination Program

To ensure a safe and uniform distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) has established a COVID-19 Vaccination Provider Program which providers are required to adhere to. To become eligible as a COVID-19 vaccinator, the provider must enroll in the federal COVID-19 Vaccination Provider Program coordinated through their jurisdiction's immunization program. Due to the competency required, organizations should only contract with a third party holding the proper certifications and licensing for administering the vaccine.

Preparation and supplies

Safely distributing the COVID-19 vaccine to the public will require thorough planning. The distribution site should be able to maintain current physical distancing guidelines while handling the new influx of visitors. Proper safeguards should be in place to accommodate senior citizens and/or those who may be medically compromised or have limited mobility. Parking lots, walkways, entrances, and exits should be adequately lit and well maintained. Potholes, broken slabs, and abrupt elevation changes should be addressed to mitigate trip and fall hazards. Use entrance floor mats if necessary and have wet floor signs available. Additional controls, such as barriers, distancing signage, and floor markers should be used to minimize contact, and thermometers should be in place at entrances for screening.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

Ensure there's a sufficient supply of PPE on site. Extra face masks should be available to staff and visitors who are without, as well as enough pairs of disposable gloves to change after each vaccination. In case of a shortage, staff should be prepared to address any inventory limitations and plan accordingly. There should also be resources in place for handling the disposal of hazardous materials including blood, waste, and sharps. An adequate amount of cleaning supplies and hand sanitizer is necessary to maintain proper personal and workplace hygiene. Additionally, an emergency response program should be drafted and should include a first aid kit, automated external defibrillator, and 9-1-1 call plan. Any medically-related transportation should be carried out by emergency medical services.

Vaccine logistics and security

Transportation, storage, and handling of the COVID-19 vaccine will require proper chain of custody procedures and vigorous oversight. After the vaccine arrives at the provider's facility, they must be able to maintain the manufacturer-recommended temperature to ensure viability. To be successful, the distribution site should have well-trained staff, an inventory management program, and reliable cold storage. A standard operation procedure (SOP) should be developed and revised if necessary. A good SOP will not only cover daily operations, it will also address incident response and equipment failure. Continuous video monitoring of the vaccine storage should be in place to deter and/or identify any wrongdoing, improper handling, and to help with any chain of custody disputes. Coverage should also include all entries/exits, parking lots, and other areas of travel on the property.

This list is by no means exhaustive and should not serve as a how-to guide. If a private organization wishes to operate as a COVID-19 vaccine distribution site, they should seek legal counsel and defer to the authority having jurisdiction in that area.