



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



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MAYOR LIGHTFOOT AND CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH MARK TWO YEARS SINCE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC TOOK HOLD BY RECOMMITTING TO VACCINATION EFFORT, AND HEALTH AND RACIAL EQUITY FOR ALL CHICAGOANS

CHICAGO – Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot joined Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) Commissioner Allison Arwady, M.D., ahead of the two-year anniversary of the first COVID-19 death in Chicago and the outbreak taking hold here, honoring those whose lives were lost to the virus and recommitting City to fighting the pandemic and addressing the racial health disparities that were so heightened by the outbreak.

Patricia Frieson of the Auburn Gresham neighborhood in Chicago was the first person in Illinois to die from COVID-19 on March 16, 2020. Tragically, her sister passed away just days later, too, and more than 7,500 other Chicagoans have died from COVID-related causes in the two years since. It was in mid-March 2020 that significant mitigation efforts were put in place in an effort to keep the virus contained, including a statewide 'stay-at-home' order.

"It's been a long, challenging two years since COVID-19 first hit home here in Chicago," said Mayor Lightfoot. "Our health care and other front-line workers have been heroes, and I can't imagine what the toll would have been without them. But we have lost too many lives, including Patricia Frieson and unfortunately thousands more. So, this is a time to remember and honor them, and also to recommit ourselves to tackling the health and racial disparities that made this pandemic so devastating, especially in our communities of color."

Lifesaving vaccines have helped to turn the tide against COVID-19, and case counts and test positivity are down significantly in recent weeks, allowing the City to drop its indoor mask

and vaccine requirements. But too many Chicagoans remain unprotected, especially among Black residents.

“Last December, we marked the one-year anniversary of vaccines arriving in Chicago, and they have been a game changer, saving thousands of lives,” said Dr. Arwady. “But as omicron showed us, this virus is unpredictable, and it is not done with us. COVID-19 will continue to be with us, and we can’t let up in our push for vaccination, and our commitment to fighting racial inequities. They were brought to light by the pandemic but that’s been a focus of CDPH for decades, and we’re now doubling down on those efforts.”

CDPH continues to offer free, at-home vaccination to everyone age 5 and older in Chicago. Vaccines are also widely available at pharmacies, doctors’ offices, federally qualified health centers, pop-up clinics, and more. Call (312) 746-4835 to make an appointment for at-home vaccination, or visit [Chi.gov/covidvax](https://chi.gov/covidvax) to find a vaccine near you.

Equity in vaccination continues to be a focus as communities of color, which have been disproportionately impacted by the outbreak, have consistently had lower vaccination rates. While nearly 82 percent of Chicagoans age 5 and up have had at least one dose of the vaccine, for Black Chicagoans that number is just 61 percent.

From the start of the pandemic and throughout its vaccination campaign, the City has prioritized equity. And there have been positive results – while Latinx Chicagoans trailed badly in early vaccination rates, they are now even with white Chicagoans at 75% each with at least one dose.

These equity efforts took many forms. Early on, the City created the Racial Equity Rapid Response Team (RERRT), which brought together community leaders, public health entities, city government, and health institutions to help craft Chicago's equitable COVID-19 response strategies and put those strategies into action. The result was resources dedicated to the most highly impacted communities.

“Equity is not only part of the COVID-19 recovery strategy, equity *is* the strategy,” said Candace Moore, Chief Equity Officer who led the Racial Equity Rapid Response Team. “And as we continue to move forward, the work done with the RERRT continues to guide our work toward long-term systemic transformation which will impact generations of residents across our City.”

The [Protect Chicago Plus](#) program was a targeted vaccine distribution program launched in February 2021 designed to best reach the individuals and communities most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and connect them with vaccines. It dedicated vaccines and additional resources to these communities, especially Black and Latinx residents, and partnered with local community stakeholders to develop tailored vaccination and engagement strategies to help community residents get vaccinated.

CDPH also created [Healthy Chicago Equity Zones](#) as an extension of this racial and health equity work. CDPH allocated \$9.6 million from COVID-19 relief funding to establish these zones – six geographic areas covering the entire city led by regional and community organizations that are creating community-based stakeholder coalitions focused on targeted strategies to improve community and individual wellness for the long term. The HCEZs are helping the City better address the health disparities that were further amplified during the pandemic.

A lot of this work is an outgrowth of CDPH's [Healthy Chicago 2025](#), Chicago's five-year community health improvement plan that focuses on racial and health equity to meet our goal of reducing the Black-white life expectancy gap.

Select statistics from the City's equitable vaccine distribution strategy:

- COVID-19 Hotline: Call center has managed 366,838 inbound calls and 101,305 outbound calls for a total of 468,143 calls to date
- Protect Chicago At Home: 31,816 doses administered through the At Home program to date; plus an additional 3,521 doses as part of a special homebound program (Mar-May '21)
- COVID-19 Vaccine Ambassadors: Over 19,000 doors knocked to date

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