

Asian American Townhall Meeting on COVID-19 Vaccination

Tuesday, February 23, 2021 from 7:00pm-8:30pm

Summary

The Office of Community Partnerships (OCP) and Asian American Health Initiative (AAHI) hosted a virtual community conversation on the COVID-19 vaccine in Montgomery County on Tuesday, February 23, 2021 from 7:00pm to 8:30pm. The moderator for this event was Dr. Hina Mehta, Vice Chair of AAHI Steering Committee. Introductions by County Executive Marc Elrich, Council President Tom Hucker, Councilmember Sidney Katz, and Council Vice President Gabe Albornoz kicked-off the event. Panelists included: Dr. Raymond Crowel (Department of Health and Human Services), Dr. Mahesh Ochaney (Community Physician), Dr. Mo-Ping Chow (Community Physician), and Jasmine Vinh (AAHI). The townhall was conducted via Zoom and streamed live on the AAHI Facebook page. The main topics covered during this event were:

- Facts about the COVID-19 vaccine
- Registration process for COVID-19 vaccine
- Difference between State and County priority
- Alternative locations to get the vaccine besides the County Government

Link to Recording of Townhall:

<https://www.facebook.com/montgomerycountyinfo/videos/1329952804039213>

Resources Mentioned During Townhall:

- COVID-19 Information Portal:
 - <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/covid19/vaccine/>
 - Vaccine Preregistration Help phone number: 240-777-2982 (8am-6pm)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 Information:
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
 - Vaccine hesitancy PowerPoints, healthcare provider resources, toolkits, and additional resources are available in Asian languages
- Montgomery County's Office of Human Rights:
 - <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/humanrights/>
 - Call to report discrimination/hate crime: 240-777-8450
- Montgomery County's Office of Community Partnerships
 - <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/partnerships/index.html>
- Asian American Health Initiative
 - Email: info@AAHIinfo.org
 - Website: <https://aahiinfo.org/>
 - Phone: 240-777-4517

Asian American Virtual Townhall Meeting

- **Welcome:** County Executive Marc Elrich, Council President Tom Hucker, Councilmember Sidney Katz, and Council Vice President Gabe Albornoz discussed the following:
 - They addressed the rising amount of hate crimes involving Asian Americans and stated that Montgomery County will not tolerate hate crimes against the Asian American community. Please call the police and report the hate crime.

- If you preregister for the vaccine and the vaccine becomes available, notices will be sent out via email.
- The County uses zip code analysis of pre-registered residents to make sure that vaccines are distributed around the county.
- **Opening Remarks:** Council Vice President Gabe Albornoz
 - In Montgomery County, over 220,000 residents filed for unemployment.
 - Over 1,000 people died from COVID-19 in the county.
 - There have been challenges on the federal level regarding vaccine distribution. Each state is supposed to decide on how they implement their own systems.
 - The vaccines given to people who work in the county may not be county residents.
 - There is no centralized registration system for the vaccine, which leads to confusion.

Panel: Dr. Raymond Crowel, Dr. Mahesh Ochaney, Dr. Mo-Ping Chow and Jasmine Vinh

- **Department of Health and Human Services Presentation:** Dr. Raymond Crowel: Process of getting vaccinated in Montgomery County
 - For access to the PowerPoint please go to: <http://aahiinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/GETTING-VACCINATED-PowerPoint-February-23-2021.pdf>

➤ **Panelist Questions**

Medical Questions:

Dr. Mahesh Ochaney:

- **What are vaccines and why should people get vaccinated?**
 - Vaccines are biological agents that help us build immunity to fight infection. The body creates proteins called antibodies to protect you from future viruses. Vaccines contain microbes or part of the microbes that get injected into the individual and the body responds to such with antibodies. In the real world when you get exposed to the germs or viruses, you don't get the disease, or you get the disease in a much milder form. Vaccines not only help the individual but also help everyone around them. If you're vaccinated, you are going to protect those who can't get the vaccine and lower the spread of the infection.
- **Can you tell us about the mRNA technology?**
 - Getting vaccines can't give you the virus. COVID-19 vaccines have mRNA strands, not the whole virus, so it cannot transfer the disease. The spike proteins of the virus, contained in the vaccine, are released into the human body and as a result, the body produces antibodies to attack this foreign invader. Vaccines help you to fight the disease and prevent infection or if you get the disease, a milder form. The mRNA does not interfere with a person's DNA.
- **What are the current available vaccines for COVID-19?**
 - Currently there are two vaccine Pfizer and Moderna.
- **Since you just mentioned side-effects, can you tell us more about the side-effects of these two vaccines?**
 - There are no major side effects. However, some people may experience milder side effects such as: low grade fever, body aches, fatigue, ache at the injection site—these reactions show that the body's immune system is working. These minor side effects could last a couple days or even a few days. These side effects tend to be seen more after the second dose and more often in the younger population. Major side effects are rare. If you have a severe reaction to any

vaccine, drug, or food, you should be vaccinated under close medical supervision. If you have hives or wheezing or a major reaction after first dose, don't get second dose. If you are allergic to any known components of the vaccine, you should not get the vaccine.

Dr. Mo-Ping Chow:

- **How do we know these vaccines are safe when they are so new?**
 - Traditionally, the vaccine goes through three phases before being marketed to the public. Even though the vaccines were developed in a short period of time, they are always monitored by a committee. The vaccination committee didn't find any life-threatening side effects (very rare 3-5 people per million). 64 million doses have been issued and there has yet to be any life-threatening events. The vaccine is safe.
- **I have an underlying chronic health condition. Should I still get the vaccine?**
 - Absolutely. You should get the vaccine and those with underlying health conditions have a priority to get it. It should be safe for them.
- **Do I have to continue to wear a mask and avoid close contact with others after I have been vaccinated?**
 - You can still be a carrier of the virus even after vaccination because the virus can hide out in your nose and such, which means that sneezing and coughing can still spread the disease. Keep wearing masks—it's important!

➤ **Questions from the Audience:**

Medical Questions

Dr. Mahesh Ochaney:

- **Women who are or are planning to get pregnant, should they get the vaccine?**
 - The data is limited on COVID vaccine safety in pregnant women. Pregnant women who have COVID-19 have higher chance of complications versus infected unpregnant women of that age. High risk women should consult their healthcare provider and consider getting vaccinated.
- **What about children and the vaccine? When will vaccines be available for children?**
 - Right now, Pfizer is authorized for vaccine trial tests for 16-year-olds and up and Moderna for 18-year-olds. A vaccine for 12-year-olds and up should be out around late spring or even early summer. For younger kids, it will take longer to come out, possibly several months.
- **Should I get the COVID vaccine even if I got the COVID infection?**
 - Yes, you should get the vaccine. We don't know how long natural immunization lasts, which is the immunity from having the disease. You can get reinfected. The guidelines are to wait 10 days after infection to get the vaccine.

Dr. Mo-Ping Chow:

- **We hear about virus variants. How effective is the vaccine on these variants?**
 - The vaccine is still effective but may be less effective on virus variants. Basically, it's still effective but we're not sure which vaccine is more effective on the variant. It's a race between the time when people get vaccinated versus the time the virus becomes a variant. We need to get vaccinated as soon as possible before the variant becomes more prominent or more variants arise.
- **I'm supposed to get the shingles vaccine. Can I get the COVID vaccine too?**

- The guideline is that currently you cannot get two vaccines at the same time. You must wait 14 days in between vaccines. The grace period for the second dose is within 3-4 days earlier prior to the second dose. If you lag, you want to get the second dose within 14 days, it can be longer but no longer 6 weeks.

Montgomery County Questions

Dr. Raymond Crowel:

- **I fall under 1b and 1c. I have preregistered but have not received any notice, how long will it take?**
 - It has taken 8 weeks to vaccinate approximately 58% who are 75 years and older. Vaccination will start speeding up once there are more vaccines and vaccination sites. The County will start vaccinating other groups while finishing up each tier. It will be another few weeks until county starts looking at other groups.
- **Are there any walk-in sites for the vaccination in Montgomery County?**
 - There are no walk-in sites to honor those who have preregistered. We found that walkups invite too many people from everywhere.
- **When does the county think that people under 65 and those with medical conditions can start registering and getting vaccinations?**
 - Those who are 18-64 with medical conditions will get the vaccine before the County starts vaccinating more broadly.
- **Will the county set up vaccination sites with community partners?**
 - There have been conversations with Chinese Cultural and Community Services Center (CCACC) and Pan Asian Volunteer Health Clinic to have a vaccination site to bring doses to places that are familiar to community members. We are partnering with groups to pilot a program to bring vaccines to people's homes and independent living communities for seniors. This will bring vaccines to those who can't get to the vaccine. Continue sharing the information about the vaccine. Preregistration is important. Community-based organizations and faith-based organizations can help. If community members need help, these organizations can help the member out to register for the vaccine and help to schedule for an appointment.
- **Some areas have a high minority population and even high COVID cases. Does the county have a plan to focus on these specific zip codes?**
 - We have been tracking, since the beginning, which zip codes have the highest risk of infections. We put a vaccination site and allocate doses in places that are "hot spots" for the virus.
- **What is the county doing to share information about vaccine rollout updates to isolated seniors?**
 - Making sure community partners have information is important, especially as situations change. Making sure they're connected to community organizations. Making sure information is in many languages. Engaging seniors in other ways other than in a digital way.
- **What about vaccination and teachers?**
 - Educators are being vaccinated currently. We are partnering with state to increase vaccinations. Schools are determining who is coming back to decide who gets the vaccines. We are taking their prioritization list for vaccines and filling them.

Asian American Community Questions

Jasmine Vinh:

- **What are the most significant vaccination issues you have encountered in Asian American community?**
 - There are significant barriers facing the Asian American community in accessing the vaccine, the most common being language barriers. With new COVID information, all of it is shared in English first and then eventually translated into the top Asian languages spoken in the community. At AAHI, we try to make sure that this information gets out as soon as possible and is ready for community consumption. Technology divide is also a big barrier. It affects many of the seniors trying to get the vaccine. To preregister, you must be proficient in reading English and to do so on a computer screen. Community-based organizations have played a big role in preregistering folks. Transportation and misinformation lead to vaccination problems. Due to the isolation of the senior population, they are susceptible to misinformation. We do our best to give them access to correct information.
 - **What materials exist for Asian Americans? How are you making sure this information gets distributed in the language they are looking for?**
 - I have been referring the community to CDC website (translated to common Asian languages). As the information is new, it's translated into a common Asian language. There are toolkits for community-based organizations to teach the community about vaccine, address vaccine hesitancy and build confidence in the vaccine.
 - **How is the Asian American Health Initiative (AAHI) ensuring equity in vaccine distributions?**
 - Holding community conversations and providing facts to empower community members to take charge. We have a space for the community to come together to ask questions so that we can provide them facts. At the beginning there was a lot of hesitancy in the Asian American community but after a while, community members started seeing everyone around them get the vaccine. However, there is still much work to be done. Community members can contact AAHI for more COVID information.
- **Closing Remarks:** Dr. Raymond Crowel: Last year we were at a start of a pandemic. The vaccine gives us hope. This requires a lot of time, patience, and teamwork. Thank you.