

# Standing Up a Flu Vaccine Clinic and Prepping for a COVID-19 Vaccine Campaign

Vaccinating millions of Americans against COVID-19 is proving to be a daunting task. Even as that virus is raging, another virus – the flu – threatens to put even more stress on EMS and healthcare systems.

When the state of Indiana set a goal of vaccinating twice as many people for flu this year as last year, they turned to Indianapolis EMS (IEMS). This October, IEMS held a series of community flu shot clinics, with the goal of not only preventing flu, but developing best practices for EMS's eventual participation in COVID-19 vaccine campaigns.

"EMS is a fantastic force multiplier in healthcare, to get out in the community and help do the heavy-lifting with the health department to get the masses vaccinated," said Shane Hardwick, the IEMS paramedic who led the effort for his agency.

Under the National EMS Scope of Practice Model, which has been adopted by many states, licensed paramedics and advanced EMTs (AEMTs) are permitted to administer immunizations. EMT-Basics have typically not been permitted to administer vaccines in most places.



However, to increase the number of vaccinators available to carry out mass vaccine drives, at least two states – [Indiana](#) and [Massachusetts](#) – have authorized EMT-Basics to administer COVID-19 vaccines. There are about 24,600 licensed EMS professionals in Indiana, and 40,000 in Massachusetts.

"This clears the way for EMTs and paramedics to help ensure as many Indiana residents receive the vaccine, as quickly as possible, which is essential to saving lives from coronavirus in the months to come," said Dr. Michael Kaufmann, Indiana's state EMS medical director.

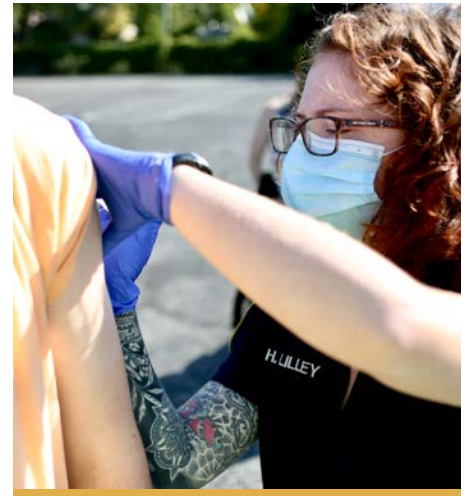
## Going to where the patients are

For four weeks in October, IEMS paramedics staffed a flu vaccine clinic in a parking lot in a low-income neighborhood, where many residents struggle to access medical care and other basic needs.

The free immunizations were offered during a regularly scheduled food distribution event. "While they were waiting in line for food, we had them filling out consent forms for the flu vaccine," Hardwick said. As an added incentive, Shepard Community Center, which funded the clinic, gave residents McDonald's gift cards or gas cards.

To keep the line moving, one medic served as the "prepper" to prepare the vaccine, another as the "poker" to administer the vaccine, and a third as the "paper person" to handle documentation. Paramedics also wanted to figure out how many people their three-medical team could vaccinate per hour.

Over four days, they vaccinated about 475 people, and found their three-person crew could vaccinate one person every 2.5 minutes, or 24 people per hour.



## How can EMS practitioners get involved with the vaccine effort?

Dr. Michael Kaufmann, Indiana's state EMS medical director, provides these tips.

**1. Individuals:** Contact your local health department or hospital and offer your services as a vaccinator. Paramedics and advanced EMTs can administer vaccines in most places. EMTs not permitted to give vaccines can still help out as a patient greeter or by registering patients.

**2. EMS agencies:** Contact your local or county health department and offer to partner with them on vaccine clinics.

**3. EMS agencies:** Register with your state department of health as a vaccine provider. Some states have added an additional registration requirement for COVID-19 vaccine providers.

## Getting EMS involved with vaccines statewide

IEMS best practices were used to help create new state guidelines for EMS vaccine efforts.

“We looked at this pilot to be able to show that EMS could provide vaccines in a cost-effective manner, and they could reach at-risk or hard-to-reach populations, such as the uninsured,” Kaufmann said. “The pilot did so much in that regard that we now have other EMS agencies in the state doing permutations on that same plan Shane was able to put together.”

In November, the Indiana Department of Homeland Security published a 72-page [guidance document](#) for EMS conducting vaccine clinics. The document contains a one-hour vaccine training program (“Principles of Vaccinations”), vaccine protocols, how to register vaccines with the state’s Immunization Registry Program, vaccine storage and handling tips, and tips for planning, organizing and maintaining social distancing during drive-through and walk-up clinics.

Indiana’s Medicaid program recently approved reimbursing EMS agencies for vaccine administration. Commercial insurers will likely follow suit, Kaufmann said.

In addition to flu shots, EMS can potentially help catch up children who have fallen behind on their scheduled immunizations during the pandemic. And when the COVID vaccines are rolled out, EMS agencies are ready to rapidly deploy to assist.



Indianapolis EMS providing flu shots in October.

Plans are underway for EMS to help staff mobile vaccine units, which will be sent to rural, underserved areas, and to provide coverage at out-of-hospital vaccine administration sites in case of adverse reactions.

“We have been encouraging EMS agencies to reach out to hospitals and public health departments and let them know that our agencies are available, willing and ready to help with the effort,” he said.



*Indiana’s EMS vaccine guidance document has valuable information for any EMS agency interested in getting involved with vaccine efforts. [Read it here.](#)*



Upper Pine River Fire Protection District in Colorado conducts COVID-19 testing.