

The Columbus Dispatch

LOCAL

Columbus Urban League partners with OhioHealth to expand vaccine distribution equity

Céilí Doyle The Columbus Dispatch

Published 6:00 p.m. ET Mar. 27, 2021 | Updated 5:40 a.m. ET Mar. 28, 2021

Brittany Jackson sat outside the Columbus Urban League on Saturday, chatting quietly with the nurse administering her first shot of Pfizer vaccine in the King-Lincoln Bronzeville neighborhood on the East Side.

Sporting a "God Is Dope" T-shirt written in highlighter green, Jackson offered a thumbs up and a smile that crinkled the eyes above her mask. How did it feel to finally receive the vaccine?

"On deck," she said with a laugh, as the soft beats of Spotify's "Soul Coffee" playlist echoed across the parking lot.

The 34-year-old was one of 240 people to receive the coronavirus vaccine through the "pop-up" COVID-19 vaccination clinic over the weekend, courtesy of a partnership between the Columbus Urban League and OhioHealth.

Access, vaccine mistrust drive inequity among communities of color

People of color, specifically African-Americans, have been historically undeserved, and the Black community has well-documented, legitimate doubts about the medical community's intentions after government experiments like the Tuskegee study, Stephanie Hightower said.

The urban league's president and CEO, Hightower also wanted to ensure there was more opportunity for Black and brown folks — especially working-class individuals who cannot afford to take off work in the middle of the week — to be vaccinated.

"White people are getting vaccinated 23-24 times greater than Black people," she said. "Yes, there is some hesitancy around the vaccine because of the mistrust, but the other part of this is also about access."

Becca Barbeau, OhioHealth's operations director for community partnerships, emphasized that building trust and expanding equity opportunities is what inspired their decision to team up with the Columbus Urban League.

"There are a lot of barriers that create health care deserts," she said. "OhioHealth truly believes there should be equal access to the vaccine, and that drives a lot of our equity work."

In addition to the pop-up site, OhioHealth also has a wellness mobile clinic that drives up to the YMCA in the Hilltop and has been administering between 30-40 doses of vaccine a week for the last month, Barbeau said.

She anticipates they will continue to expand their pop-up sites with the urban league and branch out with other local community partners to distribute vaccines.

'Make an informed decision'

For Brittany Jackson, who works in the area for child care non-profit Action for Children, access still remains a huge issue. She tried to initially schedule an appointment through the state's Get the Shot website but couldn't find an opening anywhere despite being eligible.

Jackson was also frustrated that the majority of the state's vaccination sites were located in areas like the state fairground, a potentially difficult place to reach for Black residents throughout the city.

"Yeah, they're serving a lot of people, but if you can't make your way there, then it isn't really accessible," she said.

The local program coordinator also said there is a serious history of fear surrounding vaccines as a Black person. Her own mother was shocked Jackson wanted to get the shot.

"There is still a real trepidation and a real stigma," she said.

Still, Jackson urged anyone with doubts to look up studies on COVID-19 vaccine efficacy and health disparities online, but to avoid relying on word-of-mouth conjecture from friends or social media posts.

"Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are not research and your friends are not research," she said. "You should make an informed decision based on the facts and do what's right for you."

Ohioans 18 years and older with an OhioHealth MyChart account can schedule COVID-19 vaccine appointments online

at: <https://mychart.ohiohealth.com/MyChart/Authentication/Login?>. If you are not an OhioHealth patient or do not have a MyChart account, call the hotline at (614) 533.6999 to schedule.

cdoyle@dispatch.com

[@cadoyle_18](#)