



Transit Considerations: Bringing Clients to a COVID-19 Vaccination Event

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Introduction

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) emphasizes the importance of vaccinating people experiencing homelessness and asserts that homeless shelter staff should get vaccinated as soon as they can and [stay up to date on their vaccination](#). Whenever possible, vaccination should occur in shelters or settings that people experiencing homelessness frequent, like meal service sites. If this is not possible, Continuums of Care (CoCs) and homeless services providers may need to transport shelter clients to vaccination events. This document outlines considerations for transporting people to community settings to be vaccinated.

General Transportation Considerations

Before a vaccination event in which clients will be transported to and from an offsite location, CoCs and shelter providers must plan ahead to ensure a smooth process.

- **Be ready at a moment's notice:** Many homeless service providers are given 1–2 days' notice for vaccination events.
- **Consult with public health and transit partners on COVID-19 safety:** Assure that established infection control protocols are followed during transit to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Consult the CDC's [How to Protect Yourself and Others](#) resource.
- **Communicate clearly and early:** Share information with clients on an ongoing basis leading up to the event, including schedules with an estimated duration of the event, transportation protocols and timing, and what to expect during and after an event.
- **Plan for contingencies:** Expect deviations from the original plan. Be flexible and adaptable when situations arise and incorporate lessons learned into future planning.
- **Ensure access to personal protective equipment (PPE):** COVID-19 protocols in place in congregate settings should also extend to transportation. Ensure everyone being transported has access to masks and understands what masking requirements exist. The homeless service provider should bring extra masks with them in the transportation vehicle in case individuals need a mask or masks become soiled or are lost. Consider taking additional precautions for people who are immunocompromised or at risk for severe disease. Providers are encouraged to check the [community transmission levels](#) to make decisions on what level of precautions are needed.

Logistics Details to Consider

Before the event, the CoC and shelter providers responsible for transporting people should have a plan that considers the following:

- Confirm with public health partners about the types of available vaccines and eligible age ranges for staff and clients to determine who will be transported.
- Determine the location, date, and window of time that clients/staff will be vaccinated to determine the number of vehicles and drivers needed.
- Secure vehicles and drivers for the event.
- Review address and parking and prepare maps for drivers and staff.
- Consult agency insurance policies to ensure transportation is covered.
- Ensure appropriate consideration for accommodating clients with disabilities or varying abilities to ensure transportation options are available to them and that the vaccination site is also accessible.
- Identify if any individuals to be transported have medical conditions that will need to be addressed during the trip (e.g., medication taken at a specific time or severe asthma that requires regular inhaler usage).
- If children are being transported to get a vaccine, ensure appropriate car seats or boosters are available.

Vehicle Safety and Cleaning Protocols

Once event details (such as the number of people to be transported and the timing of the event) are understood, determine which type of vehicle should be secured. Options include buses, vans, cars, or a combination thereof. Establish safety protocols, including the safe capacity for each vehicle based upon social distancing protocols (6-foot distance between individuals), a seating chart to maintain social distancing protocols and the safety of the driver, and the PPE supply needs for each event. CoCs and shelter providers should review the CDC's detailed information for [cleaning and disinfecting](#) and guidance on [how to protect oneself on public transportation](#) and provide the following while transporting individuals to and from the event:

- Hand sanitizer, tissues, and wastebaskets should be available at multiple points during transit including upon boarding, exiting, etc.
- Increase outside airflow when possible according to [CDC ventilation guidance](#).

Community Partners and Funding Options

Consider using public transit, community partners, or private transportation companies if vehicles within a homeless service provider's or CoC's network are unavailable. Some public transportation systems may have emergency management plans in place that can support a vaccination event by lending vehicles and drivers. Faith-based organizations may have vans or shuttles they can lend, or private transportation or tourism companies can be considered for rental options. Before the event, have a clear understanding of how transportation costs will be tracked for reporting purposes. Transportation is an eligible activity under many funding sources, including:

- United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)—Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) or ESG Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act ([ESG-CV](#))
- HUD—Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) or [CDBG-CV](#)
- HUD—Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) or [HOPWA-CV](#)
- Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)—Medicaid
- Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)—Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program

Clear Communication and a Trauma-Informed Approach

CoCs and homeless service providers should be prepared to provide additional support to those who are hesitant about getting vaccinated or have concerns about leaving the shelter for vaccination appointments. See the CDC's [Communication Resources for COVID-19 Vaccines](#) to access related materials to help increase vaccine confidence. Transporting people who have vaccine hesitancy or concerns about leaving the shelter for a vaccination appointment may require additional time and planning. To help relieve anxiety and put people at ease, CoCs and shelter providers should:

- [Talk with clients ahead of time and offer information about the vaccine and the vaccination event](#).
- Distribute a schedule of the event. Include times for staging, bus loading and departure, arrival, estimated duration of time people will be at the event location, departure back to point of origin, etc. Be sure to build in time for post-vaccine observation and rest upon returning to the congregate setting.
- Provide information about [what people can expect](#) while at the vaccine location. Vaccine ambassadors and staff can play a key role in accompanying people throughout the event to allay concerns or anxiety.
- Plan for contingencies (e.g., traffic leads to longer travel times, the event itself runs longer than expected, etc.).
- Consider how to make the trip comfortable and welcoming. Traveling to an unfamiliar location and receiving a vaccine may cause unease and heightened anxiety. Be clear about the location where the event will take place and the time you will be away. Provide supplies that may help people feel more comfortable such as a bottle of water, snacks, or warm outerwear if clients will be outdoors for an extended period.
- Ensure vaccine ambassadors are available throughout the event. Have staff watch for heightened anxiety and be ready to engage and support people as needed. Identify options for transportation back to the shelter (and a staff person to accompany them) if a single client is unable to continue at the event so that you do not jeopardize everyone's participation.
- Know the locations of restrooms, chairs, or other rest areas for clients.

- Secure shelter beds and meals for all people attending the vaccination event to alleviate concerns that they will miss them. Provide secure storage for personal belongings to prevent transporting items to vaccination events.
- Anticipate a percentage of clients to have side effects to the vaccine that require additional accommodations at a hotel room, medical respite facility, or designated shelter bed so they can rest and recuperate.
- CDC’s [infographic on the 6 Guiding Principles to a Trauma-Informed Approach](#) provides helpful planning considerations for a trauma-informed event.

Staff Roles and Responsibilities

Shelter provider staff, volunteers, and [vaccine ambassadors](#) should work together to:

- Identify a transportation lead that will oversee the logistics of the operation.
- Host meetings where staff, volunteers, and vaccine ambassadors can ask questions, discuss event logistics, and plan for contingencies.
- Assign drivers for vehicles if drivers are not being hired.
- Identify a staff member or vaccine ambassador who can offer support to individuals who have a significant behavioral response during the event.
- Support people throughout the event; for instance, by [providing information](#) to boost vaccine confidence.
- Consider holding brief stand-up meetings before each transportation event to inform all parties involved of any changes, new information, or things to be aware of during the event.

Rural Considerations

Many rural communities do not have a robust public transportation system. To transport individuals experiencing homelessness to an event, rural providers should explore partnering with school systems, faith communities, local bus companies, and Centers for Independent Living that may have vehicles available to transport clients to and from medical appointments.

Some rural communities may need to plan for transporting individuals over a long distance to vaccination events. Planning should include providing meals or snacks at different points of the day and maintaining social distancing and other safety protocols during meal distribution and consumption. Plan to stop at a rest area or other location with restrooms and a place for individuals to spread out and eat a meal. Contingency planning should include an overnight stay at a location such as a motel, church, or school if inclement weather arises and the trip cannot be completed. Also prepare for unexpected situations such as flat tires, vehicles breaking down, running out of gas, etc.

Community Example of Bus Seating Configurations and Capacity Estimates

The Massachusetts Department of Education has a thorough guide that offers different seating configurations based on bus sizes. The diagram below represents a 77-passenger bus. You can view [configurations for other school bus models](#) as well.

