

<https://www.henricocitizen.com/articles/data-shows-more-henricoans-are-providing-racial-data-when-vaccinated/>

Data shows more Henricoans are providing racial data when vaccinated

But among those whose race is known, Blacks and Latinos still disproportionately trail whites in vaccinations

By [Tom Lappas](#) | on February 17, 2021

Richmond and Henrico Health District officials this week have a better sense about the race or ethnicity of the Henricoans who have received COVID-19 vaccinations than they did two weeks ago.

New data released Wednesday by the RHHD shows that nearly 75% of the 55,000 county residents who had received at least one dose by Feb. 16 had reported their race. Two weeks ago, [only about 61% of those vaccinated had done so.](#)

As the percentage of people who haven't reported their race has dropped, the percentages of the those who have received the vaccine, grouped in one of six racial classifications, all have increased.

The largest increase was among whites, whose totals jumped from 41.9% two weeks ago to nearly 50% Tuesday among people for whom race was identified. That's nearly equal to Henrico's overall percentage of whites (53.7%).

Two weeks ago, only 11% of those who reported their race were Black and just 1.8% were Latino. Tuesday, those numbers had risen slightly, to 14.1% and 2%.

But Blacks (29.4%) and Latinos (5.5%) make up nearly 35% of the county's population, so they still appear to be vastly underrepresented in vaccination data.

Those who are classified as Asian or Pacific compose 8.2% of the county's population and have accounted for 4.1% of known vaccine recipients to date, up from 2.8% two weeks ago.

Those who placed themselves in the "other race" category compose 3.1% of the county's population and have accounted for 3% of known vaccine recipients as of Wednesday, up from 2.8% two weeks ago.

Health district officials have been working to proactively reach more Black and Latino communities, prioritizing seniors 65 and older based in part upon race and also proactively inoculating residents of independent senior living facilities, with those served by Medicare prioritized first. They've also held vaccination events at local churches with predominantly minority congregations.

But among those 65 and older, the same disproportionate levels exist: whites (who account for two-thirds of the county's senior population) compose just more than 60% of those vaccinated who reported their race. Blacks (who compose more than a quarter of the senior population) account for only 12.4% of vaccine doses administered to those who reported their race. About 21% of seniors didn't provide racial data.

It's unclear whether the vaccination numbers are lower for Blacks and Latinos primarily because those

groups are more likely to be hesitant about being vaccinated or because whites represent a higher percentage of the groups of frontline workers (healthcare workers, educators and public safety officials) who have been vaccinated so far.

As an additional way to fill in the data gaps, RHHD officials have been assigning volunteers at vaccination sites to encourage those who are being vaccinated to complete the racial data before receiving their shots (though they're not required to do so). As people come back for their second doses, the health district also hopes to capture that information from people who didn't previously include it.

Nearly 8,800 Henricoans in their 50s had been vaccinated by Tuesday – the most of any age group, but just slightly. People in their 30s accounted for nearly 8,500 vaccine recipients, followed by those in their 80s and their 60s (each just more than 8,300 people).

Women have been vaccinated more frequently than men in Henrico at a rate of nearly 2 to 1, according to the data.

<https://www.henricocitizen.com/articles/as-new-vaccination-opportunities-arrive-henrico-health-officials-seek-to-fill-in-reporting-gaps/>

As new vaccination opportunities arrive, Henrico Health officials seek to fill in reporting gaps

CVS COVID-19 vaccination registration opens Tuesday; another option could be on the way next month

By [Tom Lappas](#) | on February 08, 2021

A new way for Metro Richmond senior citizens to be vaccinated against COVID-19 arrives this week, though like the existing method, it will be able to serve only a fraction of the people who want to be inoculated.

Registration for COVID-19 vaccination spots at 36 CVS stores in Virginia – including at least one in Henrico – initially was scheduled to begin Tuesday, then Monday night delayed until Thursday before switching back to Tuesday at www.cvs.com/immunizations/covid-19-vaccine?icid=cvs-home-hero1-banner-1-coronavirus-vaccine#statetool for seniors 65 and older who already have completed interest forms or registered with their local health districts.

Vaccinations at the stores are expected to begin as soon as Friday, though the company is expected to have less than 1,000 available doses per store on average each week, at least initially. The Citizen has learned that the CVS location at 5001 West Broad Street is expected to be the only county location offering the vaccine. Walk-in appointments will not be accepted.

CVS and federal officials announced Feb. 2 that they were partnering to roll out vaccination opportunities in 11 states. But in Virginia, there's still some uncertainty about the process and who will be vaccinated.

Last week, state vaccination coordinator Danny Avula indicated that he and other Virginia officials were hopeful that CVS could pull names from the state's existing list of people who already have completed interest forms signifying that they want to be vaccinated.

But as of late Monday morning, Richmond and Henrico Health Districts Nurse Manager Amy Popovich said she hadn't heard whether that would be happening immediately or at all.

To date, nearly 46,000 Henrico citizens have received a dose of vaccine, and more than 8,200 have been fully vaccinated.

This week, Popovich said, the 6,300 weekly doses the district is receiving will continue to be used for healthcare workers, public safety and education workers, and employees and residents of congregate settings, as well as seniors 65 and older.

But with more than 117,000 from the groups in Henrico and Richmond having indicated that they want to be vaccinated, it is expected to take until sometime next month before anyone else in the two localities receives a dose of vaccine.

Next Monday, however, the RHHD is planning to make public at vax.rchd.com an interest form for people 16 to 64 who have pre-existing conditions. That will be the first chance those citizens have to request a vaccine; health district officials hadn't opened the sign-up to them yet because they realized it would be a number of weeks before vaccinations were possible for them, barring an unforeseen and dramatic increase in the number of vaccine doses provided to the district.

About 65,000 people in Henrico and Richmond have received at least one dose of vaccine so far, meaning there are about 52,000 people in the two localities eligible in the current phases of vaccination (1A and a portion of 1B).

RHHD officials are prioritizing eligible seniors according first to age, second to race/ethnicity (with Blacks, Latinos and those from other disproportionately affected groups elevated in the process) and then according to when they completed the interest form.

But as they attempt to reach people from those groups considered most at-risk, data – or the lack thereof – is clouding the process.

Citizens are not required to indicate their race or ethnicity on the interest form or when they arrive in person for their shots, and in Henrico, more than 39% of those who had been vaccinated by Feb. 1 opted not to provide it.

RHHD officials, though, aren't simply ignoring that gap. Instead, they are establishing larger "call banks" of volunteers who are contacting people to register them for first or second doses of the vaccine – and in the process, urging people to provide racial or ethnic data if they haven't done so already.

"Our focus really is on reaching out to that 40%," Popovich said Monday. "That's our focus now, is really trying to collect more of that data to ensure that we have a better understanding of what's actually happening."

The district also is getting creative, Popovich said, in how it reaches out to minority communities, realizing that the level of trust they feel about healthcare providers and vaccinations in general tends to be lower than in white populations.

This past weekend, the RHHD hosted several mobile pop-up vaccination clinics at predominantly Black churches, which resulted in several hundred inoculations. The idea, Popovich said, was about trust.

"We are being intentional with our doses," Popovich said. "Faith-based organizations, community organizations, networks that really know their communities and know their communities of color – they have that trust that we don't have, and we're having very specific focused events in those ways."

Faith leaders views as critical in vaccination process

VCU Massey Cancer Center Director Robert Winn agreed that the importance of faith-based organizations and other community groups can't be understated as part of the vaccination process.

"The truth of the matter is, there was a period of time where folks didn't trust their doctors or scientists – but the interesting thing is that under almost all circumstances, they trusted their faith-based leaders,"

Winn said.

More help could be coming this month, when a third vaccine (from Johnson & Johnson) is expected to earn emergency approval. It could be in circulation by late this month or early next, Winn and Popovich said.

Winn spoke glowingly of the vaccine, which, unlike the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines, is a one-dose shot and can be stored in refrigerators, unlike the other two.

Though the Johnson & Johnson vaccine's effectiveness levels are at about 70% (compared with about 95% for the other two), Winn said his takeaway is simple.

"The reality is, it's effective," Winn said. "At the beginning of this in March and April, we were hoping that we would have the Moderna and Pfizer vaccine be even at 70[% efficacy]."

The annual flu vaccine is effective only about 40% to 60% of the time, Popovich said.

Winn, who is Black, has heard discussions among minorities who are concerned that they'll be offered only the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and who view it in a negative light because of its lower efficacy levels.

"The truth of the matter is I don't think that this is a real argument, that there is somehow a sub-standardization of putting in, say, the Johnson and Johnson [vaccine] to at-risk populations because we want to give them the lesser," he said. "I'd actually argue on the other end – that we're providing something that's more mobile, and you can store it in doctors' fridges. They're stable, you can give them to people, and it's one shot – and you get effective outcomes."

"It gets the job done, and it's still outstanding."

<https://www.henricocitizen.com/articles/remaining-portion-of-phase-1b-will-be-eligible-for-vaccinations-soon-in-henrico/>

Remaining portion of Phase 1B will be eligible for vaccinations ‘soon’ in Henrico

By [Tom Lappas](#) | on March 04, 2021

If you’re among the thousands of people who qualify for COVID-19 vaccinations in the portions of Phase 1B that have not yet become eligible for them, your day is coming – soon.

The Richmond and Henrico Health Districts will open vaccine availability to the rest of the phase – which includes people 16 to 64 with pre-existing conditions, grocery store workers, public transit workers and food, agriculture and manufacturing workers (among others) – this month, RHHD Nurse Manager Amy Popovich said during a press briefing Thursday.

“It is [coming] soon, and it will definitely happen in March,” she said, indicating that the districts will begin registering people from that group the same day they announce an expansion of the phase. The first vaccinations of people in that group then will occur just a few days later, she said.

The RHHD is rapidly making its way through remaining registrants from Phase 1A (which includes healthcare workers and long-term care residents and employees) and the currently-eligible registrants from Phase 1B (which includes seniors 65 and older, public safety officials, congregate living residents and employees and educators), Popovich said.

It’s been helped by an increased quantity of doses – now about 10,180 total first doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines each of the past two weeks, plus about 5,000 of the newly approved Johnson & Johnson vaccine this week.

Officials are making calls and sending emails Thursday and Friday to register more seniors for the three mass vaccination events they are planning March 6, 8 and 10 – at which total of 12,000 seniors will be vaccinated, Popovich said.

The March 8 event will provide the one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine, while the other two will offer the Pfizer vaccine. People who don’t want to take the Johnson & Johnson vaccine when it’s offered to them can decline to do so without falling to the end of the opportunity line, Popovich said. (They’ll simply be contacted again for other opportunities in the near future.)

In addition, the RHHD has now distributed vaccine doses to 20 partner facilities in the two localities, she said – a group that includes primary care officers, safety net agencies (two free clinics and two federally qualified health centers that serve the uninsured or underinsured), pharmacies, urgent care facilities and major healthcare systems.

Each of those entities is following the same vaccination criteria that the RHHD follows in its own events, Popovich said, meaning they are offering the vaccine only to those who are currently eligible in Phases 1A and the first three groups of Phase 1B and (in some cases) are using names provided to them by the RHHD directly.

“They have been in lock-step with us in our phased approach and in our equity approach,” Popovich said.

The RHHD receives lists each week from the four safety net providers that show how many of their patients are 65 or older, Black or Latinx and uninsured or underinsured, Popovich said, and then gives each one the amount of vaccine it can administer to those people that week.

The independent partner pharmacies are administering vaccines to some people from the RHHD list, to others in congregate settings and to a third group of people who may lack computer or internet access – meaning they would be eligible but don’t have a way to pre-register, Popovich said.

At Henrico’s Bremo Pharmacy (one of those independent partner pharmacies), Director of Clinical Services Tana Kaefer said officials have been diligent in reaching out directly to that latter group of senior clients since they first received doses Dec. 31.

“Those patients are the most thankful that they weren’t forgotten,” she said. “It’s been very rewarding.”

The pharmacy has compiled a waiting list through its website for people 65 and older who want to be called if extra doses remain at the end of a particular day, she said. That way, it’s hoping to avoid random walk-in vaccine-seekers.

Popovich encouraged people who are motivated to find the vaccine however they can not to just drop in at pharmacies or mass vaccination events.

“Our recommendation is to not try to drive around or to try and show up at events,” she said.

Once the districts open vaccine availability to those in the 16-to-64 group with pre-existing conditions, almost all of those people (at least initially) should expect to be vaccinated at partner sites, she said, and not as mass vaccination events.

Those partner sites are best equipped to determine how to prioritize specific qualified patients under their care, Popovich implied.

“All of our partners across the board at all of our events are only vaccinating [Phase] 1A and [Phase] 1B [groups] 1, 2 and 3 – the police, schools, fire, daycare and congregate settings – and then we’ll all communicate and open up at the same time when we include [the rest of Phase 1B].”

<https://www.henricocitizen.com/articles/covid-increase-isnt-what-it-seems/>

Sudden apparent rise in new COVID-19 cases in Henrico isn't what it seems

By [Tom Lappas](#) | on July 02, 2021

New COVID-19 cases in Henrico County suddenly are rising again – or are they?

On Friday, the Virginia Department of Health reported 55 new cases in the county, the fourth straight day that new case totals had risen after a relatively benign two-month period, and just one day after the county reached the [70% vaccination threshold among adults 18 and older](#). Friday's apparent new cases accounted for more than 30% of all 180 new cases reported in Virginia, according to the VDH.

But the numbers aren't actually what they seem to be, according to Richmond and Henrico Health Districts spokesperson Cat Long, who told the Citizen that they actually reflect data corrections from previously identified cases – some as far back as last year.

VDH officials are correcting previous data to make sure that each reported case, hospitalization and death are attributed to the proper localities – those in which each person lives – and as a result, adjustments within each category may be skewing the agency's dashboard figures in certain localities.

That's the case in Henrico, where officials have identified several dozen cases that should have been attributed to county residents but were attributed elsewhere previously.

The long and short of it: There's no sudden increase in new cases here.

Other localities are exhibiting similar data adjustments, such as in Richmond's case, which reported negative 77 new cases during the past four days (an indication that cases previously attributed to the city actually occurred in residents who lived elsewhere).

The data correction process could take two weeks or so, Long said.

When cases, hospitalizations and deaths related to the virus are initially reported, officials don't always have the personal information of the patients involved, so they may attribute a case to testing site or a hospitalization to the location of the hospital at which a patient is treated, for example, until they're able to update the information later.

It's unclear how many actual new cases have been reported in Henrico during the past four days, but Henrico had witnessed only one day with more than 30 new cases between May 6 and June 29.

The VDH also reported five people in total from Henrico were hospitalized because of the virus Thursday and Friday, as well as one new virus-related death in the county, but some or all of those also may be the result of data corrections.

Henrico ranks below the state average in the seven-day positivity percentage among PCR tests (1.7%, compared with 1.8% statewide) but its positivity percentage among rapid testing encounters (3.9%) is

nearly twice the state's average of 2.1%, according to the VDH.

Chesterfield County hasn't reported more than 16 new cases on a single day since it confirmed 18 June 3. Chesterfield has been reporting roughly 650 to 700 COVID-19 test results each day during the past two months, slightly higher than the 600 or so Henrico has reported on average during the same timeframe.

Richmond hasn't reported more than 16 new cases on a given day since reporting 17 on May 14, though on average during that time only about 350 to 400 COVID-19 tests have been conducted in the city each day.

<https://www.henricocitizen.com/articles/in-the-shadows-of-richmond-raceway-vaccination-irony-becomes-evident/>

In the shadows of Richmond Raceway, vaccination irony becomes evident

Henrico Census tract that includes the region's most successful vaccination hub is itself the least-vaccinated in the county

By [Tom Lappas](#) | on May 06, 2021

The Henrico community that's proven the most difficult to vaccinate is the one that sits within eyesight of the region's most successful vaccination hub, where more than 150,000 doses of vaccine have been administered.

That irony, though, may not be surprising.

The communities adjacent to the Richmond Raceway, where Henrico and Virginia Department of Health officials have been holding mass vaccination events for more than three months and which just this week surpassed that 150,000-vaccination mark, are among the most vulnerable in the county.

Overwhelmingly, residents of Census tract 2008.05 (a 1.9-square-mile area that extends from just south of Laburnum Avenue near the raceway north to encompass the raceway, St. Luke Apartments and the Forest Lawn Cemetery, among other pockets of homes) are young, single, poor and Black, according to U.S. Census American Community Survey data from 2019.

More than 41% of the 3,700 or so residents there are living below the poverty line, earning an average of just more than \$22,000 annually per capita. Two-thirds of residents are 39 or younger. Eighty-five percent of those 15 or older are single. About 87% are Black.

Taken separately, most of those demographics present clear challenges for health officials seeking to vaccinate as many people as possible.

Together? They create a perfect storm of vaccination resistance – even if that resistance isn't entirely intentional.

A shift in strategy

The Richmond and Henrico Health Districts serve both localities, which include a total of 130 Census tracts (64 in Henrico, 66 in the city). The Henrico tract that includes the raceway is the only one in the county that ranks among the bottom 20% for vaccinations within the RHHD's territory, according to data provided to the Citizen by the districts; the others are all in Richmond.

That reality – that people within walking distance of the raceway are being vaccinated at a lower rate than those in every other Henrico community – exemplifies the challenge facing health officials as they move into the next phase of vaccinations.

Henrico residents who wanted to be vaccinated as soon as possible now have had that opportunity. RHHD officials had offered vaccination appointments to nearly everyone on their pre-registration list a week ago. Now, they must be proactive and strategic in how they reach out to those who haven't yet gotten a shot.

They hope that increasing access to the vaccine will be a good starting point – but that doesn't just mean physical location of vaccination sites. After all, physical proximity isn't an issue for residents who live near the raceway, but time and availability might be.

With so many single adults and such a high percentage of children living in the raceway's Census tract – an estimated 30% of its population is younger than 16 – working parents struggling to make ends meet simply may not have the time or ability to schedule a vaccination during a work day even if they want to.

Those who are younger than 16 aren't eligible to be vaccinated yet anyway (though emergency use authorization for children and teens 12 to 15 could come within days for the Pfizer vaccine). That reality may be partly to blame for the low vaccination totals among residents near the raceway in particular, too.

Walk-up appointments, like the ones available on select days through the end of the month [at the raceway](#), [Virginia Union University](#), [George Wythe High School](#) and 342 CVS locations in Virginia, among others, should make it easier for some to get the vaccine.

But there's also still vaccine hesitancy statewide and nationally among some in the Black community, leery of previous vaccine and medical mistreatment of the community throughout U.S. history. In Henrico, Blacks account for nearly 30% of the population but only about 19% of all vaccinations, as of April 26, according to RHHD data. By contrast, whites compose about 54% of the population but more than 61% of those who have been vaccinated.

RHHD community health worker Ivy Bell has heard other explanations while working in local communities to administer vaccines about why some people are choosing not to get the shot.

“The most shocking was people who were wanting to get it but were listening to other people who didn't want to get it on why they shouldn't get it,” Bell said. A number of others told Bell they were waiting to get the vaccine to ensure that it was safe.

But, she said, some younger people were interested in being vaccinated.

“They were asking were they old enough to get it,” she said.

In general, though, plenty of young, healthy adults simply haven't made vaccination a priority because they are at a much lower risk of poor outcomes from COVID-19 if they get the virus. In Henrico, only about 10% of those who had been vaccinated through April 26 were in their 20s, according to the RHHD. (The median age of residents of Tract 2008.05 is about 28.6.)

Addressing social vulnerabilities

In addition to the Census tract surrounding the raceway, officials from the RHHD have flagged 11 other tracts in Henrico as areas of vaccination concern – either because they rank high in social vulnerability categories that put residents at greater risk for negative consequences from the virus or

hinder their efforts to be vaccinated (6); have experienced a high COVID-19 case burden (3); or both (2).

One of the latter two tracts sits adjacent to the raceway tract, just to the west; the other is a bit farther east, also along the Richmond-Henrico line (north of I-64 and south of Creighton Road, bisected by Dabbs House Road).

RHHD officials are spending time in each of those Census tracts in Henrico (and in 27 in Richmond), working to have conversations with residents to answer their questions about the vaccine.

“Some folks really appreciate that one on one, wanting to talk to a person in person,” said RHHD Health Equity Director Jackie Lawrence. “We always try to pair our staff in communities with folks who have cultural relativity. In some communities, door-knocking is ok. In other communities, it’s maybe not the best to knock on doors.”

In the latter instances, officials may visit laundromats or other places that attract people instead, she said.

“We know that hesitancy is a big player here,” Lawrence said. “By no means is the health department trying to force anyone or persuade anyone – we want to provide information, so that way people can make their own decisions.

“We’ve found that when people have way more information, we notice a shift. We believe [information] is the main pillar of empowerment.”

At the same time, health workers continue to encounter a steady stream of misinformation as they talk with people.

“There is so much going on that is not factual,” Lawrence said.

She and RHHD Nurse Manager Amy Popovich encourage people who have been vaccinated to share their experiences honestly – good or bad – with those who haven’t been.

“If today someone is not ready, that’s ok,” Popovich said. “You can invite them back to talk to you later about it. If folks are not ready, there will be time later, too.”

<https://www.henricocitizen.com/articles/henrico-officials-to-state-give-us-the-shots-period/>

Henrico officials to state: ‘Give us the shots – period’

Supervisors, other leaders miffed at vaccine allocation shift

By [Tom Lappas](#) | on March 24, 2021

Henrico officials are frustrated that state health leaders apparently are prioritizing COVID-19 vaccine doses for four new, strategically located state-run mass-vaccination sites ahead of the one the county has been operating itself for months at Richmond Raceway.

They’re also upset that localities that already have entered Phase 1C of the vaccination process are receiving more doses proportionate to their populations than Henrico is receiving in relation to its – even as Henrico continues to lead the state’s 10 largest localities in vaccine doses administered (more than 25,000 per every 100,000 citizens).

Their frustrations became evident in a public way Tuesday during a Henrico Board of Supervisors meeting, hours after county officials conveyed similar concerns in interviews with the Citizen.

Their chief complaint: that the two actions will delay the county’s vaccination process needlessly, making it more difficult to inoculate the tens of thousands of Henricoans who remain in Phases 1A and 1B and cause more delays advancing to Phases 1C and 2.

Henrico, officials said, already has proven that it can manage the vaccination process more effectively than any other state locality. The raceway was Virginia’s first mass-vaccination site, is its longest-running one and has administered more doses in a single day (just more than 7,000) than any other in Virginia.

Yet, state officials – who have held press conferences at the raceway several times to highlight its efficiencies – didn’t include the site in their initial group of community vaccination centers, which are designed to quickly and efficiently vaccinate large numbers of people in areas most affected by the virus. Four CVCs – in Petersburg, Prince William, Danville and Portsmouth opened recently, funded by the state and manned by contractors. Each is receiving as many as 18,000 weekly doses now.

Meanwhile, Henrico is paying for the operations at the raceway itself and vaccinating not only county residents there but those from several neighboring jurisdictions as well (using doses provided by those localities).

“We have shown we can do it,” Three Chopt Supervisor Tommy Branin said during Tuesday’s meeting, of the county’s vaccination efforts. “We have the capability to do it. We’re not asking for state funds to do it. Give us the shots – period. I don’t understand where the state gets confused with that.”

Said Board Chair Dan Schmitt, of the Brookland District: “The infrastructure that we have set up is there. To recreate a wheel that is ready to spin . . . like, it’s spinning. . . send ‘em there. It’s ready. If the state wants to make a quick impact for Commonwealth of Virginia residents, use the infrastructure that

already exists. You have [a wheel] ready to spin – spin it.”

‘No doubt’ raceway site could perform more daily vaccinations

Henrico officials now have formally asked the state to declare the raceway site a CVC so that it, too, can receive more doses.

Henrico Chief of Staff Cari Tretina told the Citizen Tuesday that the site could perform 10,000 vaccinations per day if it had the available doses.

“There’s no doubt in my mind,” she said.

Henrico Deputy County Manager for Public Safety Tony McDowell echoed those comments during the board meeting Tuesday night.

“We feel that we’re uniquely positioned to be a regional vaccination site because we have the proven capability to provide as many as 700 vaccinations per hour,” McDowell said.

Varina District Supervisor Tyrone Nelson said that while he understood the need for greater emphasis on vaccinations in places like Petersburg, which has a higher percentage of minorities, it shouldn’t be prioritized over Henrico, which also still has great needs – and which has proven it can meet them, if given a sufficient number of doses.

“So pretty much we are being short-changed so that these vaccination centers get the shots,” Nelson said. “But that’s also hurting other communities.

“There are low-income Black and brown people who still haven’t gotten shots in the Richmond Henrico Health Districts. We can’t take less – we need more, because we’ve got the capacity. Why go backwards and not forward?”

Separately, the state’s other recent decision – to allow local health districts to enter Phase 1C of the vaccination process as they determine they’re able to do so – is having a negative ripple effect on available vaccine quantities in Henrico, too.

The Richmond and Henrico Health Districts operate as one for vaccination purposes, and they have received just more than 12,000 first doses of vaccine the past two weeks. That’s the same quantity they’ll receive next week, they learned Tuesday, because they aren’t yet in Phase 1C.

But other localities that have entered that phase are now receiving more doses, proportionate to the number of their citizens eligible.

The RHHD, however, still has tens of thousands of people eligible to be vaccinated in Phases 1A and 1B, meaning it can’t move to 1C until sometime in April, according to RHHD Nurse Manager Amy Popovich. And it can’t simply look at the number who have pre-registered, she said – it must account for a portion of others who may not have access to the internet to pre-register or who simply may not have done so yet for any number of other reasons.

A total of 11,800 doses of vaccine will be administered at the raceway during the next four days – first doses Wednesday and Saturday, second doses Thursday and Friday, McDowell told the board. Workers

there will “barely break a sweat” doing that number, he said, after Schmitt pointed out that based on its 7,000-dose day last week, 28,000 doses would be possible there during the next four days.

Henrico County Manager John Vithoulkas told supervisors Tuesday that he would set up a call with state officials, including vaccine coordinator Danny Avula (Henrico’s health director) in the coming days to discuss the county’s concerns.

<https://www.henricocitizen.com/articles/henrico-not-quite-ready-for-phase-1c-vaccinations-yet/>

Henrico not quite ready for Phase 1C vaccinations yet

About 70% of all seniors in Henrico and Richmond have received at least one dose of vaccine

By [Tom Lappas](#) | on March 25, 2021

Henrico officials hope to open the COVID-19 vaccination process to people in Phase 1C sometime in April, but they're not quite ready to do so yet.

The Richmond and Henrico Health Districts, which are operating jointly to vaccinate residents of the two localities, still are working through residents of the two localities who are eligible in Phases 1A and 1B, according to RHHD Nurse Manager Amy Popovich. So far, officials have offered doses to all but about 23,000 of those in Phase 1B who pre-registered for them, she said.

But, she said, "we certainly know that there are others [in 1A and 1B] who are interested in the vaccine who are not yet pre-registered, either because they don't have access, they don't know about it, etc. So we use that as a minimum number."

About 1,000 people eligible in Phase 1A are contacting the RHHD each week to be vaccinated, she said, and those people typically receive doses within about a week or so.

"We won't move into Phase 1C until we have the supply where we can confidently say that the number of eligible 1C folks can actually access those vaccines," Popovich said.

There's encouraging news for local seniors, though; about 70% of people 65 and older in Henrico and Richmond have received at least their first doses of vaccine, Popovich said.

"We've made really good headway there," she said.

Seniors no longer need to pre-register for the vaccine – they may simply call the RHHD hotline at 205-3501 to be scheduled for vaccination. More than 600 seniors did so in the past week, Popovich said.

The RHHD is continuing efforts to proactively reach seniors who may not have access to the internet or who simply may not be aware of the pre-registration or registration processes, Popovich said. It's using mobile clinics and sending community health workers into communities to register people, and it's also started a new effort to reach homebound seniors who can't get out to be vaccinated.

Anyone in the latter group should call 205-3501 to request that a mobile unit come to them, Popovich said; the RHHD is able to fulfill about 15 such appointments weekly but hopes to be able to expand those efforts in the near future, she said.

Next week, the health districts will establish a community vaccination hub at St. James Church in Varina, where it will vaccinate about 200 people a week through outreach efforts in partnership with the church. The hub is expected to offer first doses for three weeks and then second doses to those same people for three weeks.

The RHHD continues to receive about 12,000 first doses of vaccine per week, Popovich said, though it could get slightly more than that next week as Johnson & Johnson doses re-enter the process. (Virginia received an initial batch of J&J doses at the beginning of the month but none since, as the company worked to ramp up production.)

But the state was expecting 100,000 doses of J&J next week and instead will get only about 49,000, Popovich said, adding that she wasn't sure how many of those the RHHD might receive.

Of those 12,000, the districts are reserving 35% for people with pre-existing conditions and disabilities; 35% for essential workers; 20% for seniors 65 and older; and 10% for people in Phase 1A. It's dividing those doses between its own events and a number of partner pharmacies and medical offices.

In addition to those 12,000, several pharmacies and community health centers in the two localities are receiving vaccine doses directly from the federal government, though Popovich said she wasn't sure exactly how many doses were being given in Henrico and Richmond each week through those locations.

Henrico officials earlier this week expressed frustration that despite their success in planning and operating mass vaccination events at Richmond Raceway, the facility was not designated as a community vaccination center by the state – a label that would have made it eligible to receive more weekly doses of vaccine. (The raceway was the state's first mass-vaccination site and recently vaccinated more than 7,000 people in a single day – the most of any site in the state on a single day.)

Though Henrico operates and funds the raceway events itself, the state is paying for the operations at the four CVCs it recently established in Petersburg, Danville, Prince William and Portsmouth. State officials chose those locations because they are in areas heavily hit by the virus and at most risk for serious outcomes, and each is receiving as many as 18,000 doses per week.

Popovich reiterated that local officials are doing all they can to urge the state to provide them with more weekly doses.

"We know that Henrico is very capable of administering a lot of vaccines efficiently," she said.

Meanwhile, though new daily case counts in the two localities are stabilizing, they're still not quite as low as officials would like, according to Acting Henrico Health Director Melissa Viray. Henrico is averaging about 60 new cases per day and Richmond about 33, she said. She urged people to resist the urge to give up mitigation efforts.

"We see the light at the end of the tunnel – we're getting there, we're really close. . . but we just ned to continue those same containment measures," she said, such as mask-wearing and social-distancing.

COVID cases and vaccinations surging in Henrico

By [Tom Lappas](#) | on August 26, 2021

Henrico reported 161 new COVID-19 cases Thursday – its highest single-day total in more than a six and a half months, since it witnessed 196 Feb. 6. The county is now averaging 114 new daily cases during the past seven days, according to the Virginia Department of Health.

Twenty-two new hospitalizations also were reported among Henrico residents, but a Richmond and Henrico Health Districts official told the Citizen that while the region is seeing an increase in hospitalizations, most of those reported Thursday actually were data corrections reflecting hospitalizations from earlier this year.

For the first time in three days, there were no new deaths attributed to the virus in Henrico, according to the VDH.

Henrico's seven-day PCR testing encounter positivity percentage of 10.3% (as of Aug. 22) is the highest that metric has been since it reached 10.4% Feb. 1 and is slightly higher than the state average of 9.9%. The county's rapid testing encounter positivity percentage of 11.4% is more than 2% higher than the state average.

Vaccinations picking up

Nearly 1,100 Henricoans have received their first dose of COVID-19 vaccine in the past three days, data shows, and just more than 1,000 became fully vaccinated during that time – a significant jump from the three previous days, when just about 260 received a first dose and 250 became fully vaccinated.

The spread of the delta variant likely is causing some people who hadn't yet gotten vaccinated to do so now, according to Richmond and Henrico Health Districts statistician Kyle Wending.

"I imagine that's influencing some borderline people to make the plunge," he told the Citizen. "The data suggests that that was a key inflection point [at which vaccinations began to increase again earlier this summer] and continues to be."

Among eligible Henrico residents, Asians and Pacific Islanders in Henrico are the most vaccinated race or ethnicity (82%). Next are Latinos (about 77%), whose vaccination totals have been on the steepest incline of any race since late April, when only about 40% of their eligible population had gotten the vaccine.

About 66% of eligible whites in Henrico have been vaccinated and only about 53% of eligible Black people have been.

A map showing the vaccination levels among eligible residents of Census tracts in Henrico and Richmond. (All Henrico tracts begin with four digits). (Courtesy Richmond and Henrico Health Districts)

Correlation between low vaccination rates and high case incidence

Recent COVID case counts show a correlation between the groups that have and haven't achieved high levels of vaccination.

The least-vaccinated group – Black people – also are the only racial group in the county whose current infection rate is higher than its population percentage. In the four weeks from July 26 to Aug. 22, they accounted for nearly half of all COVID cases in Henrico, even though they comprise only about 31% of the county's population.

Asians, by contrast, account for about 9.4% of the county's population but only about 2% of cases during that same timeframe. White people (53.2% of the population) accounted for just more than 38% of cases.

Data from the RHHD as of Aug. 16 showed that the most vaccinated Census tracts in Henrico all were in the West End – led by tract 2001.29 in the Twin Hickory area at nearly 87% – and all but 3 of the 13 Census tracts with the lowest vaccination rates were in Eastern or Northern Henrico.

The only tract remaining in Henrico with lower than a 40% vaccination rate among eligible residents was tract 2004.12, which generally encompasses a number of apartment and townhouse communities west of the Kroger Marketplace shopping center at Staples Mill and Parham roads and east of the Henrico Police headquarters at Parham and Shrader roads.

The tract is home to about 2,350 people, more than 15% of whom live in poverty. Its demographic make-up is about 39% Black, 28% Latino and 27% white, with an average per-capita income of just \$21,000. Almost 30% of residents are foreign-born.

That tract and another farther east on Staples Mill (2004.10) that has a vaccination rate of less than 51% are among the more socially vulnerable in the county. The latter is home to about 5,700 people, more than 31% of whom are foreign-born and more than 24% of whom live in poverty.

Two tracts with fewer than 42% of eligible residents vaccinated are:

- 2008.05, which includes the Richmond Raceway complex and St. Paul Apartments and is home to about 3,700 people – about 87% of whom are Black and more than 41% of whom are living in poverty.
- 2012.02, which includes a large portion of Highland Springs and is home to nearly 6,200 people – about 78% of whom are Black and about 18% of whom are living in poverty.

Three other tracts near the raceway and five others in the general vicinity of Richmond International Airport, Highland Springs and Sandston have vaccination rates of less than 51%, according to RRHD data.

So too does one other tract in the Far West End (2001.23), which is home to about 3,800 people west of Gayton Road, south of Ridgefield Parkway and adjacent to the Goochland County line. That tract is 56% white, 16% Black and 16% Hispanic, and nearly 15% of residents live in poverty.

<https://www.henricocitizen.com/articles/covid-19-vaccination-opportunities-arrive-for-henrico-children-5-to-11/>

COVID-19 vaccination opportunities arrive for Henrico children 5 to 11

By [Tom Lappas](#) | on November 03, 2021

A handful of COVID-19 vaccination opportunities are available in the Richmond region for children 5 to 11 Wednesday, and the Pfizer vaccine – which earned final federal approval for that age group Tuesday – is expected to become increasingly available for children each day, as the first 377,000 doses allocated by the federal government to Virginia arrive in the state by Nov. 9.

Some doses should be available at Richmond Raceway as soon as Thursday, according to the Richmond and Henrico Health Districts. Several Walgreens locations in the region will offer the vaccine beginning Saturday, while some local CVS stores plan to begin offering it Sunday.

Pediatricians, other pharmacies and other RHHD events also will begin offering the vaccine for children soon, according to officials. Availability in most spots should begin in earnest Monday. Parents and guardians are being encouraged to check with their child's pediatrician or local pharmacy to learn more.

“Parents can expect to see some vaccination opportunities this week, with more coming next week and the following,” said RHHD Nurse Manager Amy Popovich. “While there is some logistics involved in receiving shipments of the lower dosage vaccine, we anticipate all eligible kids who want to be vaccinated should be able to access an appointment this month.”

Limited appointments for children are available now through vax.rchd.com and by calling the health department at (804) 205-3501. More appointment slots will be added through the website soon, according to RHHD spokesperson Cat Long.

“We don’t anticipate the same level of difficulty for kids to get vaccinated that we saw for adults at the beginning of the vaccination effort,” she told the Citizen.

There are about 723,000 children between the ages of 5 and 11 in Virginia, according to state vaccination coordinator Danny Avula, and state officials are allocating initial doses of the vaccine according to the vaccination rates of children and teens 12 to 17. That’s why, for example, five Northern Virginia localities are getting about 40% of the initial doses, he said.

More than half of all initial doses are going to the 400 pediatricians statewide that registered to serve as vaccination distribution sites and to other doctors’ offices that serve children, he said. Another 35% or so are going to pharmacies, and about 7% to community vaccination centers, or CVCs, like the one currently operating at Richmond Raceway.

Within a week or so, most parents and guardians who want to have their children vaccinated should be able to find a number of opportunities to do so, Avula said. He conceded that misinformation and

vaccine resistance could be more challenging for this new age group than with any other and said that's why partnerships with pediatricians – people who are trusted by parents and guardians – would be so important.

And, he suggested that in addition to the health benefits of the vaccine for children, a related practical benefit would be the elimination of potential missed school days, since fully vaccinated students do not need to quarantine if they are in close contact with someone who has tested positive. (In Henrico, an unvaccinated person who's had close contact with an infected person must remain out of school for 10 days after exposure, or eight days if they test negative five or more days after the exposure.)

The Virginia Department of Health will launch informational campaigns soon to inform parents about the benefits of vaccinating their children and is using a social media-monitoring service to help it quickly react to concerns or misinformation efforts that it detects within the community, he said.

Already, a primary concern for some who oppose vaccinating children is a perceived risk of myocarditis, an inflammation of the heart muscle. Though no cases were detected in the several thousand children who participated in Pfizer's trial, Avula said officials would expect about 35 to 45 such cases to occur for every one million children vaccinated.

But, "on the benefits side, the vaccination of a million people would result in the prevention of 11,000 cases of COVID, over 500 hospitalizations, 120 ICU admissions and 6 deaths," he said, adding that four of his five children already are vaccinated and the fifth, who is 9, will get vaccinated this week or next.

In order for their children to be vaccinated at an RHHD event, the health department initially will require parents or guardians to reserve appointments for their children. Walk-ups will be served if sufficient supply of the vaccine exists, but otherwise, officials will schedule children for appointments elsewhere, officials said.

Children should be accompanied by an adult 18 or older in order to receive a vaccine. If the adult is not a parent or guardian of the child, they will be asked to confirm verbally that they have the permission of a parent or guardian to have the child vaccinated.

Also Wednesday, RHHD officials announced that the state-operated community vaccination center at Richmond Raceway will close following Saturday's vaccinations and will move to the Arthur Ashe Junior Athletic Center at 3001 Arthur Ashe Boulevard in Richmond (next to The Diamond) beginning Monday, Nov. 8.

There, children and adults 12 and older will be able to make appointments or simply walk up to receive the Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer or Moderna vaccines and available booster shots, while children 5 to 11 for whom appointments have been made will be able to receive the Pfizer vaccine.

<https://www.henricocitizen.com/articles/amid-omicrons-blazing-spread-henricos-covid-19-numbers-spike-to-10-month-high/>

Amid Omicron's blazing spread, Henrico's COVID-19 numbers spike to 10-month high

By [Tom Lappas](#) | on December 21, 2021

Omicron is here, and the numbers prove it in Henrico.

The new variant of COVID-19 – which is now estimated to be responsible for about three-quarters of all new cases in the United States – likely contributed Tuesday to Henrico's highest single-day total of new cases (183) in more than 10 months. It was the most new cases reported in the county since 196 were reported Feb. 6, according to Virginia Department of Health data.

Local and national health officials are worried that the timing of Omicron's arrival – just days before the Christmas and New Year's holidays and associated large-group gatherings – could create infection levels previously unseen during the pandemic.

Omicron is significantly more transmissible than earlier variants of the virus – it accounted for only about 12% of all cases in the U.S. just one week ago – but its severity is not yet fully understood. Some early studies have suggested it may be weaker than earlier variants, but health officials aren't yet prepared to draw that conclusion officially.

At the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, officials Monday warned that Omicron could cause the country's infection levels to spike to levels that could overwhelm the healthcare system, even in the event most cases aren't severe.

"Plausible scenarios include steep epidemic trajectories that would require expedient public health action to prevent severe impacts on the health of individuals and the healthcare system," CDC officials [wrote on the agency's website](#), saying that "these scenarios may be realized as soon as January" if the variant is able to evade the immunity conferred by previous COVID infection or vaccination, as it appears to be doing in some cases.

"Upcoming holiday gatherings may further accelerate these trends," CDC officials wrote.

Health officials are urging those who are not vaccinated to get their first doses as soon as possible to protect themselves and others – while also urging those who are eligible for a booster shot (anyone more than six months from the date of their second Pfizer or Moderna shot, or two months from the date of their Johnson & Johnson shot) to get one. Though Omicron may evade vaccine immunity enough to cause breakthrough infections, that protection in most cases still prevents serious outcomes, according to health officials.

Henrico's seven-day positivity percentage among PCR testing encounters (9%) is slightly below the statewide average of 9.6%, but the county's percentage among rapid testing encounters (10.5%) is higher than the statewide average of 9.2%. Both of Henrico's figures are the county's highest rates in about three months.

Vaccinations in the county have picked up in the past five days, according to the VDH data, which shows that people in several age groups have received their first dose of vaccine at higher rates than they did during the first 16 days of the month.

For example, the overall number of Henricoans 45 to 54 who had received at least one dose of vaccine grew by just 0.42% from Dec. 1 to 16 – but then grew by nearly that much (0.4%) during the next five days. The same was true in the 55-to-64 age group, whose one-dose total grew by 0.38% from Dec. 1 to 16 and by 0.34% during the next five days.

In the past five days, nearly 700 Henrico children between the ages of 5 and 11 have received their first dose of the Pfizer vaccine (the only one available to that age group), increasing to nearly 8,900 the number of children in that group who have done so. That's more than 31% of that population in Henrico. This month, nearly 2,130 children in that range have received their first doses.

None of the other 10 age groups tracked by VDH have added more than 192 new first-dose recipients in that time, though health officials likely are encouraged by the fact that it was the 25-to-34 year-old age group that added that many. Younger people – who typically are less likely to suffer several effects from the virus – have been slower to get vaccinated than others.

Since the pandemic began, Henrico has witnessed only 20 days with more than 183 new cases, with most of those coming in the holiday aftermath in January. Its highest single-day total was Jan. 16, when 326 new cases were reported. The high case counts in January didn't significantly spike Henrico's average of virus-related hospitalizations, which remained generally in the range of 3 to 4 per day until peaking at about 11 in early March.

But the post-holiday spike early this year did produce the county's most significant spike in virus-related deaths, which jumped form an average of about 1 to 2 per day in January to more than 16 per day in late February and early March.

Officials are hopeful those outcomes won't spike again as Omicron becomes the dominant strain.

Henrico has witnessed 22 virus-related hospitalizations so far in 21 days this month – up from a net total of just 7 in November (13 were reported that month but six were removed from the county's total – possibly from that total or possibly from previous months' totals – after data corrections).

The county reported 32 hospitalizations related to COVID in October.