

CORONAVIRUS RESOURCES

[Latest Mass. numbers](#)[Town-by-town COVID-19 data](#)[Vaccination charts](#)[Vaccine development](#)[Donate](#)[More coverage](#)

| | | | |

Baker details \$4.7m vaccine equity initiative, says 50,000 new vaccine appointments will go live Thursday

By [Amanda Kaufman](#) Globe Staff, Updated February 24, 2021, 1:27 p.m.



Governor Charlie Baker on Tuesday. PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

Governor Charlie Baker's administration on Wednesday announced it would spend \$4.7 million on its new initiative to reduce barriers to accessing the COVID-19 vaccine in Massachusetts' 20 hardest-hit communities, an effort that comes amid a push from elected officials, public health leaders, and activists for the Baker administration to

prioritize equity in vaccine distribution.

Baker made the announcement Wednesday from the new mass vaccination site at the Natick Mall as he offered details about the state's appointment booking process and said about 50,000 new appointments would go live Thursday morning at the state's six mass vaccination sites in Foxborough, Boston, Springfield, Dartmouth, Danvers, and Natick.

The equity initiative, which was [first announced last week](#), will focus on communities of color, seniors who are homebound, people with disabilities, and other hard-to-reach populations, Baker's office said in a statement.

Baker said the state will work with two organizations, Archipelago Strategies Group and Health Care for All, to use the money to "reduce barriers to vaccination and to increase awareness of the efficacy and safety of the COVID-19 vaccine." It will launch this week and continue through at least June 30, Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders said at the briefing.

"This will include multilingual vaccine awareness events, services to help people navigate logistical barriers to the vaccine, especially people who are homebound or otherwise unable to get to a particular location, and others who might find certain kinds of challenges in front of them that need to be dealt with," Baker said.

The 20 communities include Boston, Brockton, Chelsea, Everett, Fall River, Fitchburg, Framingham, Haverhill, Holyoke, Lawrence, Leominster, Lowell, Lynn, Malden, Methuen, New Bedford, Randolph, Revere, Springfield, and Worcester, which were identified using a measure from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and chosen by the Department of Public Health for having the highest average daily infection rates and large proportions of residents of color.

The funding builds on a \$1 million investment in the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers to combat vaccine hesitancy in communities of color, Baker said.

Baker also addressed the state's vaccination sign-up website after it [crashed last week](#) when newly eligible residents logged on to book appointments, adding the state has been working with a team to allow the site to manage heavier website traffic, but still encouraged residents to be patient in booking their slots.

"We certainly expect the site's performance tomorrow to be significantly better," Baker said of Thursday morning, the day appointments at mass vaccination sites become available each week. "Appointments will obviously be being booked quickly when you have 50,000 appointments and somewhere around a million people will be looking for them. We anticipate they'll go fast, but as we said before, the whole issue here requires a certain amount of patience."

The state is also implementing a "digital waiting room," Baker said, to prevent outages on the website. The waiting room, one of the measures officials outlined last week to [upgrade the site](#), will put people looking for vaccine appointments in a line and take them to a page that displays more information about when they'll be able to proceed.

"It's designed to basically keep the site running and operating and to make sure people can get through, and have a smooth and uninterrupted experience," Baker said.

Baker said if the state doesn't see an increase in vaccine, he expects it will probably take a month for everyone currently eligible under Phase 2 of the state's vaccination rollout plan — residents 65 and older or those with two or more qualifying health conditions — to be able to book an appointment.

The Baker administration also announced 11 new regional collaboratives that will set up vaccination sites for eligible Massachusetts residents beginning March 1 "to make

sure that people are able to get the vaccine at a site that is convenient and accessible to them,” Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito said.

The collaboratives include Barnstable County, Berkshire County Boards of Health Association, the Franklin County Regional collaborative, Harrington Hospital in Southbridge, Heywood Hospital in Gardner, Lawrence General Hospital, Marshfield-Plymouth, North Hampton-Amherst, Randolph (a collaborative between Avon, Holbrook, and Randolph), Rutland, and in Worcester, a collaboration with Worcester State University, Commonwealth Medicine, and St. Vincent hospital.

At a [House committee hearing](#) Tuesday, drug makers said they have solved manufacturing challenges and are anticipating a major increase in vaccine deliveries in the next few weeks, a development Baker said he found “encouraging.” President Biden’s administration also told governors that vaccine doses allocated to states would grow by 1 million per week, [The Washington Post reported](#).

“On the same day to have Johnson & Johnson’s vaccine deemed safe and effective by the FDA and to have Moderna and Pfizer say they would double their vaccine production in March over the level of vaccine production they did in February is a really positive development in so many ways,” Baker said. “And I think for all of us who are continuing to struggle with some of the issues around the anxiety that’s created along the lack of supply, this could be a really big moment if in fact what folks are saying actually plays out over the course of the next 30 to 45 days.”

Bill Haas of LabCorp, the company that operates the Natick mass vaccination site, said during the briefing that the facility is currently able to administer about 100 doses per day and next week expects to ramp up to 500 per day as more nursing staff become trained in administering the shots. By April, the goal is to administer 5,000 doses per day, he said.

Deanna Pan of the Globe staff contributed to this report.

Amanda Kaufman can be reached at amanda.kaufman@globe.com. Follow her on Twitter [@amandakauf1](https://twitter.com/amandakauf1).

[Show 133 comments](#)

©2021 Boston Globe Media Partners, LLC