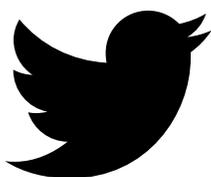


# Coronavirus Vaccinations To Begin In Boston's Homeless Community

[Lynn Jolicoeur](#)

December 23, 2020



People experiencing homelessness stand in line outside St. Francis House in Boston, in October 2020, waiting for the day shelter to open. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)

People experiencing homelessness in Boston are expected to begin receiving coronavirus vaccines within a few days.

The first vaccine shipment for the city's homeless community will be 100 doses developed by Cambridge-based Moderna, according to Dr. Jim O'Connell, president of Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program, which will administer the shots.

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O'Connell says he's confident in the organization's chances of getting a large percentage of the community vaccinated, given its long history administering single-dose vaccines for other illnesses, such as meningococcal disease.

"We've had good luck at getting homeless people living in the shelters to trust us enough to get the vaccine. But that's always been with a single dose," O'Connell said, "The challenge for us now, I think, is going to be ... once they've had the first shot, make sure that 28 days later or thereabouts, we can find them and that they're still willing to have a second shot."

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Priority for the first vaccines will go to people with the most underlying health risks at the most crowded shelters, according to O'Connell.

"We have incorporated a really interesting tool that addresses equity and other situations, but really primarily concentrates on who is most vulnerable, most likely to die if they get the virus," he said, adding that once the process for administering the vaccines is streamlined and gets faster, he expects them to start arriving in larger batches.

Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program anticipates vaccinating between 5,000 and 8,000 adults in shelters that serve individuals and families.

Lyndia Downie, president and executive director of the homeless shelter and housing organization Pine Street Inn, says some shelter guests have inquired about possible vaccine side effects, but most seem relieved the vaccine will soon be available.

"I think for so many of the guests, there's so much anxiety that goes with being homeless," Downie said. "To add the COVID on top of all that anxiety, I think has just been really, really stressful for people. ... And I think the fact that we can take one little piece of stress away and say to folks, 'Vaccine's coming, hopefully the next month or two you'll be on the list,' I just think people are going to be grateful for it."