

COVID-19 Vaccines for Residents of All Languages

Los Angeles County (County) is a diverse community of over 10 million residents, and over 54 percent of them speak a language other than English at home. While Spanish is one of the primary languages, there are several other languages spoken across the County. According to the 2010 Census, there are at least 185 languages spoken at home in the Los Angeles metro area alone. In fact, within the County, there are several threshold languages alone: Arabic, Armenian, Khmer, Cantonese, English, Farsi, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

Many County residents experience significant challenges when attempting to register for a vaccine appointment, including insufficient access to technology and English language skills. According to a study by Asian Americans Advancing Justice, nearly one in three people in the County experience difficulty communicating in English to the extent that it impacts their ability to access services provided only in English. This same study reports that the two largest immigrant populations in the County, Latino and Asian, are more likely than other residents to face language barriers, 48% and 43%,

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respectively. In order to vaccinate as many people as efficiently and equitably as possible, we need to ensure the process has as few barriers as possible. The ability to provide vaccines to all residents requires that they be served by those who speak their language and are culturally competent. We cannot expect immigrants to navigate a complex vaccination system that is further complicated for them at vaccination sites when staff or volunteers do not speak their language or are not properly trained to communicate their needs. At vaccination appointments, patients are asked critical questions about their health backgrounds to ensure their safety while being vaccinated. Absent staff fluent in their languages, patients run the risk of adverse effects that could have otherwise been prevented. That is why, as the safety net provider and the operator of several large-scale vaccination sites, the County is obligated to ensure residents, regardless of their language, can equitably access the vaccination sites.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the County Emergency Operations Center of the Chief Executive Office and the Department of Public Health to work with the Office of Immigrant Affairs in the Department of Consumer & Business Affairs and relevant stakeholders to:

1. Ensure that the County-operated points of dispensing (PODs) have trained staff present fluent in the threshold languages of the communities in which they are providing services, and report back in seven (7) days on implementation.
2. Report back in seven (7) days on an implementation plan to explore having at least one translator for each threshold language at each of the County-operated PODs.

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