

## Network Health Creates Innovative Services to Get Their Medicare Members Vaccinated During COVID-19 Pandemic

by Jenevieve Van Order, 2021 PharmD Candidate



As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, routine vaccination rates have decreased throughout all United States populations, causing public health concerns.<sup>1</sup> The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have noted that this has become a nationwide occurrence, perhaps due to shelter-in-place and safer-at-home orders.<sup>2</sup> According to the CDC, influenza vaccinations for the 2020-2021 season will be of the utmost importance, in order to help reduce influenza-associated burden on the already-stressed healthcare system.<sup>2</sup> While influenza vaccinations are crucial at this time, it is also important to provide these vaccinations in a way that minimizes the risk of COVID-19 spread and makes patients feel comfortable and safe. This is something Network Health has been striving do for its members.

Network Health is a local health insurance company that has been serving its members in northeast and southeast Wisconsin for more than 35 years. The leadership team knew they needed to find an innovative way to provide their members with vaccinations this year. Andy Wheaton (pictured above), PharmD., started working at Network Health in 2016 and is now the manager of the pharmacy department. Wheaton worked with a team to create safe outdoor vaccination clinics for Medicare members. “We began our focus with our Medicare population, because this group is generally a higher-risk population,” explained Wheaton. Network Health partnered with Walgreens and Walmart to offer these open-air vaccination clinics, which allow members to properly social distance and avoid gathering in large

groups.

In previous years, Network Health held Medicare member events in October where patients were provided with benefit updates, including pneumococcal and influenza vaccinations. In 2019, roughly 8,500 members attended these events, and approximately 6,500 vaccinations were provided. “This year, we had to explore new options with COVID-19 restrictions and precautions,” said Wheaton. Invitations were sent out via mail to a total of 65,000 members in mid-August to invite them to register for and participate in the “tent events” hosted in collaboration with Walgreens and Walmart. A Medicare member simply selected an outdoor clinic location, date, and one-hour time slot and then registered for that specific tent event and time. Members could register via a newly created online registration portal, by mail, or by phone call to the Member Experience call center. After a member registered, they received a registration confirmation and a vaccination form via mail or via an electronic method.

When Network Health decided to hold outdoor vaccination clinics, they needed to consider new factors, like the weather. According to Wheaton, “Typically, October tends to get much colder and weather is more unpredictable, compared to September. So we decided to move the events to September for better weather potential.” Network Health worked with Walgreens and Walmart to form alternate plans for inclement weather in order to avoid canceling events. “We felt we prepared for all weather scenarios.”

These outdoor tent events were held in areas of northeast and southeast Wisconsin (Network Health’s service area) and

featured elevated safety precautions in light of COVID-19. Members were screened for COVID-19 symptoms, had temperatures checked prior to vaccination, and wore masks throughout their visit. Pharmacists wore masks and face shields, and all tables, chairs, clipboards, and pens were sanitized between members. Wheaton elaborated, “We normally bring a team of Network Health employees along to our member events, but we made the decision to provide these with minimal staffing, to allow for COVID-19 precautions for the safety of our members, our partners, our employees, and the community we all share.”

The main focus of the outdoor clinics was influenza vaccinations; however, Network Health encouraged their partners to administer other vaccinations to their members who needed them for gap closure. Wheaton stated, “Pneumonia, Shingrix, and TDAP were all [also] provided during these events.” For the majority of Network Health Medicare members, there was no charge associated with influenza or pneumococcal vaccinations. “If a member chooses to get a Shingrix vaccine, there [is] generally a \$42 copay associated with this Medicare Part D benefit.”

In total 7,003 Medicare members received vaccinations and a total of 7,850 vaccinations were provided. Wheaton said that members appreciated the ability to schedule a specific time that worked best for them and that they didn’t have to wait in a long line. Most wait times were a maximum of 5-10 minutes, and members were both shocked and thankful that the process was so efficient and safe. “In general, our members had overwhelming, positive feedback about their experiences.”

With the outdoor vaccination events

complete, the Network Health team will now regroup and reflect on their experiences with these clinics, and plan to debrief with Walgreens and Walmart. Wheaton explained that they will “take a deep-dive look at what went well and discuss where [there] are improvement opportunities.” Wheaton has already reflected on some unanticipated scenarios with their tent events, including strong winds that bent the metal tent posts when under enough pressure. Another issue arose when scheduling patients in one-hour time increments; most patients showed up at the beginning of the hour, and by the end of the hour, there was a lull in patients. In the future, 30-minute time slots will be considered to keep a better patient flow during the events. In addition, Wheaton found that having multiple modes of registration caused problems with the hourly cap of members that could register, and it required a lot of time to call

members and reschedule them. For future clinics, Network Health will consider raising the time slot caps.

Looking ahead, Network Health is planning a Shingrix vaccination campaign and vaccination events. They are also collaborating with local providers to form a plan for delivering COVID-19 vaccinations once they become available. Network Health is dedicated to partnering with local pharmacies. Wheaton said, “For a pharmacy to partner with us, all they need to do is reach out to our team.”

Perhaps the key to the success of Network Health’s outdoor vaccination clinics was the team behind the events—not only Network Health staff members, but their partners, Walgreens and Walmart. Their partnerships allowed them to create an innovative opportunity for their members to get vaccinated while remaining safe. Wheaton stated, “Although my name may be on this article, I worked on a

team and had a number of people behind this team working to make these events a success... We could not have done this without everyone pitching in to make it happen.”

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### References

1. Issue brief: the impact of COVID-19 on US vaccination rates. National Foundation for Infectious Disease. Accessed October 14, 2020. <https://www.nfid.org/keep-up-the-rates/issue-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-us-vaccination-rates/>
2. Interim guidance for routine and influenza immunization services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Updated October 20, 2020. Accessed October 24, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pandemic-guidance/index.html>

Below: Flu shot postcard sent by Network Health.

## Find a flu shot event near you.

Location	Date	Time
Oshkosh Walgreens 315 W Murdock Ave., Oshkosh	Thursday, August 27 and Friday, August 28	Hourly, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Chilton Walmart 810 S Irish Rd., Chilton	Tuesday, September 1	Hourly, from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Neenah Walgreens 500 S Commercial St., Neenah	Wednesday, September 2 and Thursday, September 3	Hourly, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Green Bay West Walmart 2440 W Mason St., Green Bay	Wednesday, September 2	Hourly, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Green Bay East Walmart 2292 Main St., Green Bay	Thursday, September 3	Hourly, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Fond du Lac Walmart 377 N Rolling Meadows Dr., Fond du Lac	Wednesday, September 9 and Thursday, September 10	Hourly, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Waupaca Walgreens 925 W Fulton St., Waupaca	Thursday, September 10	Hourly, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Waukesha Walmart 2000 S West Ave., Waukesha	Friday, September 11	Hourly, from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m.
Neenah Walmart 1155 W Winneconne Ave., Neenah	Tuesday, September 15	Hourly, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Green Bay Walgreens 2204 University Ave., Green Bay	Wednesday, September 16 and Thursday, September 17	Hourly, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Oshkosh Walmart 351 S Washburn St., Oshkosh	Wednesday, September 16 and Thursday, September 17	Hourly, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Pleasant Prairie Walgreens 7520 118th Ave., Pleasant Prairie	Wednesday, September 16	Hourly, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Brookfield Walgreens 15738 W Capitol Dr., Brookfield	Thursday, September 17	Hourly, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Berlin Walmart 861 County Road F, Berlin	Friday, September 18	Hourly, from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.
West Bend Walgreens 1921 S Main St., West Bend	Friday, September 18	Hourly, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Darboy Walmart 3701 E Calumet St., Appleton	Tuesday, September 22 and Wednesday, September 23	Hourly, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Fond du Lac Walgreens 1060 E Johnson St., Fond du Lac	Wednesday, September 23 and Thursday, September 24	Hourly, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Grand Chute Walmart 955 N Mutual Way, Appleton	Thursday, September 24	Hourly, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Plover Walmart 250 Crossroads Dr., Plover	Friday, September 25	Hourly, from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Manitowoc Walmart 4115 Calumet Ave., Manitowoc	Tuesday, September 29	Hourly, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Appleton Walgreens 729 W Northland Ave., Appleton	Wednesday, September 30 and Thursday, October 1	Hourly, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Sheboygan Walmart 4433 Vanguard Dr., Sheboygan	Wednesday, September 30	Hourly, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Shawano Walmart 1244 E Green Bay St., Shawano	Thursday, October 1	Hourly, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.
New London Walmart 1717 N Shawano St., New London	Friday, October 2	Hourly, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

## Register for your flu shot today by using one of our convenient options



### Online at [networkhealth.com/flushot](https://networkhealth.com/flushot)

You will select a one-hour window for your vaccination. You'll also receive an online confirmation (make sure you save this) and a link to the vaccination form. Save time by printing and completing your vaccination form before you arrive. There will be forms available at the location as well.

– OR –



### Complete the postage-paid registration card and drop it in the mail

**Can't Attend?** If you can't attend any of our outdoor flu shot clinics, you can still protect yourself by getting a flu shot another way. Flu shots are offered throughout the community. Contact your local pharmacy, health department or your doctor's office for more information.