

Press Clippings 04-09-21 to 04-12-21

---Daily Herald---04/12/2021

State widens vaccine eligibility today, but how fast can you get an appointment?

By: Jake Griffin



All Illinois residents 16 and older are now eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, but suburban public health officials warn that appointments might be scarce initially because demand will outpace supply. *Joe Lewnard | Staff Photographer, March 2021*

Even though suburban public health officials are opening up COVID-19 vaccination to anyone 16 and older beginning today, it might take a while for those who are newly eligible to schedule an appointment.

Demand for the vaccine is expected to outpace supply for the foreseeable future, much as it did when Illinois expanded eligibility in January to more than 3 million people 65 and older and essential workers. In some cases, people in that group might still get first dibs.

"Appointment opportunities may still be prioritized for eligible individuals in earlier phases to help ensure individuals at higher risk of exposure and severe health outcomes are vaccinated," said Stephanie Calvillo, spokeswoman at the DuPage County Health Department.

Vaccine providers throughout the state are averaging about 118,000 inoculations a day, but many of those are second doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna vaccines that require a two-dose regimen.

"Patience is still the watch word of the day," Gov. J.B. Pritzker said Thursday during a news conference at a state-supported mass vaccination site in Forest Park. "We still don't have vaccine for everybody all at once. It's been a complicated endeavor for everybody."

Complicating things further is that Chicago public health officials are not opening eligibility to anyone 16 and older just yet. Pritzker urged Chicagoans to look for appointments in the suburbs.

That could make it harder for newly eligible suburban residents to find appointments, even though the state is adding 150,000 first doses at 11 state-supported mass vaccination sites in the suburbs.

Suburban public health officials urge residents to sign up for alerts on new vaccination appointments at county health department websites:

- In suburban Cook County, [visit vaccine.cookcountyil.gov](https://www.visit.vaccine.cookcountyil.gov).
- In DuPage County, residents can register online at dupagehealth.org/667/COVID-19-Vaccine.

- In Kane County, online vaccine registration is available at kanehealth.com/vaccine_appointments.
- In Lake County, residents can schedule vaccine appointments at allvax.lakecohealth.org.
- In McHenry County, vaccine registration is available at covidvaccination.dph.illinois.gov.
- In Will County, vaccination appointments are scheduled at willcountyhealth.org/covid-19/covid-vaccine.

"Once someone is in the system, they receive a notice based on their phase," said Caryn Stancik, a Cook County Health System spokeswoman. "But because all new appointments starting (today) are open to 16-plus, then everyone gets notice via email and/or text that appointments will be released at a certain time."

This new wave of eligibility also brings with it a new level of vaccine dose allotment complications. Only the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine is approved for 16- and 17-year-olds. Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines can be used only on those who are 18 and older.

There appears to be no concerted effort at suburban health departments to reserve Pfizer vaccine doses for eligible teenagers. "DuPage County Health Department is not holding vaccine back for any populations," Calvillo said. "Rather, we continue to get vaccines into the arms of those eligible as efficiently and equitably as possible."

Several large suburban school districts, such as Indian Prairie Unit District 204 in Naperville and Aurora, and **Elgin Area School District U-46** say there are no plans to host vaccinations for eligible students at the schools.

"We will work with our local health departments if they need our support," said **U-46 spokeswoman Mary Fergus**. "However, most of the current demand is being met through health departments, hospitals and health agencies."

Local health officials note newly eligible residents should check with their primary care physicians or register with pharmacy chains, where vaccine doses are also available.

Here are some pharmacy registration sites:

- [Walgreens, walgreens.com/findcare/vaccination/covid-19](https://walgreens.com/findcare/vaccination/covid-19)
- [Jewel-Osco, mhealthappointments.com/covidappt](https://mhealthappointments.com/covidappt)
- [Meijer, clinic.meijer.com](https://clinic.meijer.com)
- [Mariano's, kroger.com/i/coronavirus-update/vaccine](https://kroger.com/i/coronavirus-update/vaccine)

Illinois residents can also find vaccination sites at [the state's coronavirus.illinois.gov website](https://the.state's.coronavirus.illinois.gov).

---Press Clippings---04/11/2021
There are no U-46 related news stories.

---Press Clippings---04/10/2021
There are no U-46 related news stories.

---The Courier-News---04/09/2021

Parents and unions call for boycott over schools' plans for in-person standardized tests this spring: 'A waste of our time'

By: Karen Ann Cullotta

When Percy Julian Middle School in Oak Park began welcoming students back earlier this year on a limited basis, Susan Raphael was excited her 13-year-old son would finally resume in-person instruction and be able to gather with classmates after nearly a year of remote learning.

But Raphael's joy was soon replaced by frustration, after Oak Park School District 97 announced that — despite the prolonged COVID-19 disruptions — students would be required to spend four days this month taking federally mandated standardized tests on subjects like reading, math and language arts.

“My first reaction was, this is so silly. ... They are taking away a week of student learning when they're already losing instructional time like crazy,” said Raphael, a mother of three who has decided she will not send her son to school for the standardized testing on Monday and is unlikely to have her twin daughters take the tests later this spring.

“It seems like the system is broken, especially for students at big urban school districts like Oak Park and Chicago. It doesn't provide any benefits for my child, especially with the risks,” Raphael added. “... It's a waste of our time.”



Susan Raphael — pictured with her children Jacob, 13, from left, and twins Jeanette and Lily, 10, outside their Oak Park home — is among parents who intend to keep their children out of school during mandated assessments this spring. (Antonio Perez / Chicago Tribune)

District 97 officials acknowledged they too would rather not have to administer the tests.

“Given the unprecedented nature of this school year and ongoing concerns related to the pandemic, we were hoping to receive a waiver from testing,” said a district statement, which added that the assessments “will provide a data point, but it is our practice to take a holistic approach and consider multiple sources to tell the achievement stories of our students.”

Long the bane of educators and parents alike, the annual, federally mandated student assessments — which for students in third through eighth grades is known as the Illinois Assessment of Readiness, or IAR — were waived in 2020 after the coronavirus abruptly shut down schools.

While the Illinois State Board of Education and more than 700 Illinois superintendents asked the U.S. Department of Education for another testing waiver for 2021, their requests were flatly denied. President Joe Biden’s Department of Education said no waivers would be granted, insisting the data is critical to understanding the magnitude of what some anticipate will be a staggering loss of student learning during the pandemic.

Some parent groups and teachers unions are also lambasting the test mandate, with a recent post on the Illinois Families for Public Schools’ website declaring, “Every Child Can Refuse State Testing!” The group, along with the Chicago Teachers Union and the Illinois Federation of Teachers, is hosting an information session Monday on “how and why” to boycott the test.

“Especially this year, using time and money to administer state tests isn’t what our children and our schools need. ... Many families have chosen to remain with remote learning, meaning that they are being asked to go into school just to take the tests,” the parent group’s statement said.

“This is not what we should be doing as a school system in a pandemic,” CTU’s Testing Committee said.

Still, this time around federal officials have granted Illinois districts “accommodations” to the usual testing protocol, including waivers for “accountability,” meaning that schools will not be given “ratings,” such as “exemplary,” “commendable” and “targeted.”

School districts will also not be required to test 95% of students, and instead, are being asked to offer in-person testing opportunities aimed at attracting the maximum number of students possible.

Despite an option to postpone the tests until fall — even though fewer than a quarter of Illinois’ roughly 2 million public school students have returned to in-person classes full time — districts across the state are administering the IAR tests this spring. They must be taken in person, even to the nearly 100,000 students statewide who have not returned to school since the arrival of the pandemic in March 2020.

In Chicago Public Schools, [**where fewer than a quarter of elementary students have returned for classroom lessons**](#), leaders chose to go forward with the tests this spring “in order to minimize further disruptions for the next school year.”

“We understand the unique challenges this spring’s assessment administration may pose for educators, families, and students, and we are committed to supporting our school communities each step along the way,” the district wrote in an email to families. As one example, the district noted that some children who would typically be in school might have to learn remotely on a given day, possibly with a substitute teacher, so other students can be brought in for the assessments.

At Country Club Hills School District 160, where schools are expected to reopen this month for the first time since last year, educators discussed possibly putting off the assessments until the fall, but quickly decided against delaying the inevitable.

“We want to get them over with, so the spring testing is the route we’re going with,” District 160 Superintendent Duane Meighan said.

With nearly 70% of students coming from low-income families, many of whom are essential workers, Meighan said the district was granted an accommodation to offer the federal assessments on five consecutive Saturdays beginning April 17.

“Giving the tests on a Saturday is much more accommodating for our parents, so that is essentially the route we decided to go,” said Meighan, adding the district will offer busing and incentives, including gift cards, to increase student participation.

While Meighan said the tests will provide educators “with another piece of data,” he said the district already conducts its own assessments, including the Measure of Academic Progress, or MAP, which yields quick results and leads to individualized support for students.

“It’s been a very unusual year, navigating the pandemic, and we have a tremendous amount of concern about learning loss,” Meighan said.

In Mount Prospect-based River Trails District 26, Superintendent Nancy Wagner called the federal testing mandate disappointing, especially considering all of the hardships students, parents and teachers have faced throughout the pandemic.

“This year has been a series of not the best options to choose from,” Wagner said, adding that, like more than 90% of school districts in Illinois, the Mount Prospect-based district is delivering the IAR assessment this spring.

And with about 23% of the district’s students considered English language learners, Wagner said it is important to also provide the ACCESS Test, which gauges English proficiency and will allow some students to transition out of the ELL program.

But Wagner remains concerned that families who’ve chosen to keep their children in remote learning full time won’t feel comfortable sending them to school just to take the assessments.

“I think a lot of parents are wondering, why are we doing this at this time, especially when we’re not going to get the test results right away?” Wagner said.

The requirement to deliver student assessments during the pandemic is also troubling to some experts, who question how the data can be considered valid and useful when it is highly likely that a significant sector of students will not participate.

“Would we deploy a vaccine based on only 50% of the data from the trials? And would you take that vaccine?” said Megan Bang, vice president of the Spencer Foundation and professor of learning sciences at Northwestern University’s School of Education and Social Policy.

Bang also suggests that, during the pandemic, demanding that teachers “engage in kill and drill” classroom instruction based on testing, rather than allowing them to nurture a love of learning in their students, could lead to “an exodus of teachers on a scale we cannot fathom.”

At Elgin-based School District U-46, which enrolls more than 37,000 students, Superintendent Tony Sanders said that after holding out hope that that his students could opt out of the test, he decided that spring was “the lesser of two evils.”

“Our challenge is that many of our families have students who are still doing all remote learning, and they’re not going to send their kids into the school building just to take a test,” said Sanders, who led the contingent of Illinois school district superintendents who sought assessments waivers from Biden’s new education secretary, Miguel Cardona.

Like many Illinois school districts, U-46 also administers MAP testing, which Sanders said provides timely feedback to educators, unlike the IAR, which often has a lengthy delay before data is released to school districts.

The state is paying Pearson — the multinational publishing and education company that provides the IAR test — around \$55 million for three years of assessments. That includes \$18.6 million for 2020, when only about a quarter of students took the exams before they were halted because of the pandemic, according to ISBE spokeswoman Jackie Matthews.

“By the time we received the [federal waiver](#) and could officially [communicate to schools](#) that spring 2020 assessments would not occur, testing and scoring had already started or been entirely completed for a quarter of our students who take the IAR,” Matthews said.

The contract also has the state paying Pearson an amount not to exceed \$15.6 million to administer the assessments in 2021, and an estimated \$21 million in 2022, Matthews said.



Fifth grader Evelyn Duran works on a writing assignment during literacy block at [O'Neal Elementary School](#) in Elgin in March. Elgin-based [District U-46](#) is among the nearly 700 school districts across Illinois that requested, but didn't get, a waiver from federally mandated state assessments. (Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune)

Illinois Superintendent of Education Carmen Ayala said Wednesday that while she is disappointed that Illinois schools were not granted waivers to opt out of the IAR this year, she was encouraged by the federal approval of an array of requested accommodations.

“We are trying to provide flexibility to the maximum extent, including the choice of giving the tests in the spring or the fall, but more than 90% of our school districts want to give the assessments now,” Ayala said.

While a waiver was recently granted for the usual required 95% participation rate, Ayala said with so many Illinois students still learning remotely, it is tough to predict how many will actually take the assessments, which are still required to be conducted in person.

Nevertheless, Ayala said even some data will be useful in helping guide decisions about how to spend the roughly \$7.8 billion in federal COVID-19 relief funding earmarked for Illinois schools.

“A school may only be able to assess 70% or 50% of students in third grade, but with that data they can still see trends that emerge, and provide additional support for students in particular areas,” Ayala said.

“We want to be very intentional in addressing not only the academic, but the social emotional health of our students, and the impact of trauma,” she said. “And these assessments will help give us one piece of that puzzle.”

As Elgin starts its annual spring cleaning work, a new Litter League program enlists residents' help in picking up trash

By: Gloria Casas



The city of Elgin has launched a new Litter League program to encourage residents to voluntarily pick up trash and debris in areas that need it, like this open lot on the city's east side. (Gloria Casas / The Courier-News)

It's time for spring cleaning in Elgin.

The city's annual cleaning and beautification programs kicked off this week with clearing the right of way on arterial and collector streets of debris and trash. Crews collected 107 bags of trash in one day, Communications Manager Molly Gillespie said.

Land management, public works and parks and recreation crews from the city collected items like fence parts, bricks, and other bulk items from portions of Big Timber Road, State Street/Route 31 and National Street, Gillespie said.

Last year, crews collected nearly 400 bags of garbage and five trailers full of junk and debris from right-of-way areas, she said.

Elgin's annual right-of-way cleaning is just one of the programs the city will do this spring. Street sweeping started a few weeks ago and runs through mid-October, she said, and three public works crews will be dedicated to pothole patching through May, Gillespie said. A temporary "cold patch" is used until a "hot patch" is available when asphalt plants open for the season, she said.

While the city does its part to clean up, Elgin residents have the chance to help out through a new campaign called the Elgin Litter League.

"Litter isn't always intentional," Gillespie said. For example, when high wind gusts occur on garbage day, items can be blown from trash bins, she said.

"With limited resources and 38 square miles of city, we hope for the community's help to keep neighborhoods clean," she said. "The Elgin Litter League campaign encourages just that. (It's) similar to the city's campaign asking residents to 'Adopt a Drain,' where they are encouraged to assist with keeping storm drains clear of leaves and debris to help prevent street flooding."

Its development is a "success story of Elgin 311," she said. An Elgin resident contacted Elgin 311 with the idea after reading a city newsletter article about Sidewalk Heroes, a collaborative campaign with **School District U-46** to encourage sidewalk snow shoveling in the winter.

Participating in the Litter League is simple, Gillespie said. "You can collect litter by yourself or with a group of family, friends or other volunteers. Take a walk around your neighborhood and collect litter," she said.

"We have already helped two east side neighborhood groups that have reached out for supplies and help," she said. "We've helped by providing garbage bags, reachers and disposable gloves, and offered to collect the bags, too. Those efforts collected approximately 90 bags, eight tires, six fence panels and a few other items."

Depending on the need and availability, groups can request assistance from Elgin Allies for large cleanup efforts, she said. That's another city program for those who want to make a difference in the community, she said.

"Elgin Allies are volunteers who work on projects that fit their interests. The program provides the opportunity to engage in your own community, enrich your life, meet others, learn new skills and create memories," Gillespie said.

Residents who want information about either program should contact Elgin 311.

To join a larger clean-up effort, Friends of the Fox River will hold its annual shoreline cleanup at 3 p.m. on Sunday, April 10, in Carpentersville, weather permitting. Volunteers can meet at 39 E. Main St.

The nonprofit is also joining with state Rep. Anna Moeller, D-Elgin, for two cleanup events on Saturday, April 17. The first is from 9 a.m. to noon on the north side of Gail Borden Public

Library, 270 N. Grove Ave., Elgin. The second is from 9:30 a.m. to noon at Trout Park Rivers Edge, Duncan Avenue and Trout Park Boulevard, in Elgin.
Volunteers can sign up at friendsofthefoxriver.org/.