

# In Texas, COVID vaccines on the go

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A park near Houston has been turned into a five-lane, drive-thru vaccination center popular with the elderly in this city hard hit by the pandemic.

"I'm 89 and a half and I don't want to die young!" Mary Donegam says with a laugh as she rolls down her window and gets a shot of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

A massive vaccination campaign is underway in the United States, the country hardest-hit by the [coronavirus](#) pandemic.

Houston in particular has been battered. As of Friday, Harris County—which includes the greater Houston area—had reported 326,248 cases of COVID-19, with 4,441 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Texas has designated 82 [medical facilities](#), including the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB), as vaccine hubs. The Houston Health Department has even borrowed the Delmar Stadium in Houston's school district to deliver vaccines.

The vaccine drive is currently focusing on at-risk communities or areas. In exchange, residents are

guaranteed a safe and easy vaccine delivery.

"We found that the drive-thru works extremely well for elderly people," explains Dr. Philip Keiser, a co-chair of UTMB's vaccine task force. "Some of the elderly have mobility issues. They have problems walking."

## Five cars every five minutes

The week of February 1, Texas distributed a large portion of its 520,425 allocated doses.

"We found out that we had hub status on a Saturday. And by the next Saturday we had already done 800 doses," says Keiser, after three weeks of vaccinating at this rate.

On the other side of the city, in north Houston, the Woodlands branch of St. Luke's Health hospital became a hub during the week of January 25, delivering 2,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine—and twice as many the next week.

On Thursday, 1,200 people were signed up to get vaccinated in the comfort of their own cars.

We can do "probably about five cars every five minutes," says Eric Ransom, the director of operations. There's also a waiting list of people to contact at the last minute, to avoid losing a single dose.

"Once outside of the refrigerator, once at room temperature, it's only good for six hours," Ransom explains.

Montgomery County has made staff available to administer the jabs, while student nurses and volunteers handle the administrative work that follows.

Wearing a straw hat and a flowery blouse, Eve Taylor, 72, is on the verge of tears before getting her vaccine.

"I'm overwhelmed with this much suffering, as this pandemic has been for so many people," she says. "And so many people will suffer before it's over. And it gives me hope that there is going to be relief coming."

### **General vaccination in the spring**

In his pickup truck, Thomas Kula hopes that the [vaccine](#) will let him safely be close with [elderly people](#) again. "My wife's parents are near 90 and we do try to see them regularly," he says.

"We've been very, very cautious when we are around them. We thought this is one more way to hopefully guarantee their safety."

Health experts have warned, however, that it could still be possible to transmit COVID-19 even after getting vaccinated. Studies are under way to see if that is the case.

The Texas health department estimates that vaccination will be extended to the general public in the spring.

For now, it is limited to people over the age of 65, medical personnel, residents in long-term care facilities or people with a chronic medical condition that puts them at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

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