

BEAUMONT ENTERPRISE

Coalition brings vaccines to Beaumont residents in at risk areas

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Ellsworth / The Beaumont Enterprise

Members of the faith community have banded together in an attempt to bring COVID-19 vaccinations to hundreds of Beaumont residents in at-risk areas.

The Southeast Texas Faith and Community Leaders Coalition on Saturday launched the new initiative with a free vaccine clinic at The Gospel of Jesus Christ Church.

“Everyone knows that COVID is real, and everyone knows that there are certain parts of their community that are underserved,” said church member and event program coordinator Vernon Durden.

“So, this church along with other churches are taking a lead role in trying to provide an opportunity for people who normally would not get the shot to show up to a place they are comfortable with, like a church setting in their own community,” he said.

The Army National Guard administered Pfizer vaccines at the church, which will offer the shots again from 3 to 5 p.m. on Aug. 28 at 2575 Wilson St.

“Perhaps if the shot came to them versus them going to the shot, they would be more apt to participate or get the vaccine,” Durden said, adding that he thought having the church community involved could also help people understand that the vaccine is legitimate.

Durden said all the people involved in program have taken the vaccine, and most of the members have seen loved ones, including close family members, contract coronavirus.

Durden, who has received the vaccine, has not had COVID-19. However, his brother in California and another individual who lived with him for 26 years died from the virus. His nephew was unable to go his father’s own funeral because he also contracted the virus, which he has since recovered from.

“We all know the devastating effects of not taking the vaccine,” Durden said. “We have first-hand knowledge that persons without the vaccine may not fair so well.”

Registered nurse Mary Scott, who is the program’s vaccination coordinator for ZIP Code 77703, started the initiative as an “opportunity to bring at-risk ZIP Codes up to the state’s standards and provide protection from COVID within these communities.”

Event organizers said three Beaumont ZIP Codes — 77701, 77703 and 77705 — have some of the lowest vaccination rates in the state.

Durden believes a lack of access vaccines and information in those areas may be contributing to the low vaccination rates in Beaumont.

“When you live in an area where people do not have a bus route, when you live in an area that doesn’t have reliable transportation and a low socio-economic strata, they are more interested in the necessities of life, which is food and shelter,” he said. “They are fighting harder for those necessities. It’s not that they don’t think the vaccines is important, but it is not as important as those major necessities that they need to live every day.”

Beaumont showed up even before the event’s “official” start time on Saturday. More than a dozen vaccines were administered at the Gospel of Jesus Christ Church site. However, other churches participated at different times and locations.

Charnetta Bruno, 37 of Beaumont, and her children received the last vaccines of the day. She said she was afraid to get the vaccine, in part because of the pain, but she decided to get the it for the sake of her mother and children, who she is worried about returning to school.

“It’s spreading and it’s killing people again, but everybody is afraid of the shot,” Bruno said moving her arm around to avoid soreness after the quick injection. “I think they are afraid of what is going to happen with the shot. Everybody thinks it’s an experiment.”

In an attempt to address those fears, Durden noted that the medical community is concerned about the health of all citizens.

“They are going to do everything that they can to make sure that the vaccines are safe and reliable,” Durden said. “They are working with a lot of knowledge and experience of past vaccines to ensure that this vaccine and the potency is correct to do what it is designed to do.”

“I really don’t think we can stop,” he added. “Those of us who know better should continue to advocate for those who don’t know and give them information to help them develop criteria to make decisions on. That’s what we are doing. We are given them as much information that they need to develop the criteria to make the decisions.”

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