

COVID-19 vaccine outreach aims for communities of color



COATESVILLE, Pa. — Down the streets, along the sidewalks and right up to the front stoops: Ann Cunningham and Terry Booker are on a mission.

“Who do you know that’s not vaccinated that you can send us to?” Cunningham asked those she encountered. “Because we’ve got to take care of our community out here.”

They are trying to get people of color vaccinated for COVID-19.

“There are still a lot of folks that are hesitating because of some of the misinformation,” she said.

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This is part of an effort from the nonprofit [Black and Brown Health Advocacy Group](#). On the day we caught up with them, they were in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, a small town about 40 miles west of Philadelphia.

“It’s a tight-knit community,” Cunningham said. “It’s a town where people are working class and trying to do what they need to do every day to feed their families and take care of themselves.”

Three-quarters of the people who live in Coatesville are from underrepresented groups: half of the residents are African American and another 25% is Hispanic.

Cunningham goes to church in town and her background is in pharmaceuticals.

“One of the things I try to share is that there are people that look like me in the pharmaceutical industry,” she said.

At one home in town, she began chatting with one man sitting outside. The COVID-19 vaccine can be a tough sell there.

“That’s no different when you start talking Tuskegee and everything,” the man told her.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, about 50% of all white people in the U.S. are vaccinated against COVID-19. For Asians in the U.S., it’s 67%.

Among Hispanics, though, the number of vaccinated is lower: 45%. For Black people, it’s even lower than that, just 40%.

“It makes me a little sad because the information is not getting out to people the way it should,” Cunningham said. “There’s just way too much misinformation.”

Still, they keep pushing for frank conversations.

“People don’t trust the government,” one man told Cunningham.

She responded to him.

“Historical mistreatment is certainly an issue, but I tell you what – we got to keep it moving, got to protect ourselves today,” she said.

Cunningham stopped by one home and thanked one woman there for helping them get the word out about vaccinations.

“I could bring many, many more people down there to get vaccinated,” the woman told Cunningham, “but as you know, I had such a hard time with people telling me there’s trackers in the shots.”

Still, they say they will keep trying.

“We have had folks come back to us after having spoken to them three times,” Cunningham said.

“They’ll run up to us when they see us the next time and say, ‘I got vaccinated because I couldn’t stop thinking about what you shared with me, and the fact that you cared enough to share it with me.’”

It is moments like that which give them hope that their efforts are worth it.