

'Shots at the Shop' aims to boost COVID vaccinations as cases spike

ST PAUL, Minn. — Minnesotans, like most Americans, are used to multi-tasking to get everything on the list done.

Now there's a new opportunity for efficiency. Get a haircut or style... check. Get vaccinated against COVID while getting that new 'do... check.

Gov. Tim Walz announced Wednesday that at least 14 Minnesota barber shops and beauty salons are taking part in an initiative kicked off by the White House. It's called "Shots at the Shop," an effort to engage black-owned barbers and stylists and the communities they serve in COVID vaccine education and outreach.

"The COVID-19 vaccines save lives and every conversation that shares that message matters," said Governor Walz. "Anyone can be a strong advocate for these vaccines — whether you're a doctor advising patients, a sibling talking to a loved one, or a barber cutting your neighbor's hair."

State health officials expressed concern earlier this week about the Delta variant, which is now involved in an estimated 75% of Minnesota's new cases. That variant is making the greatest impact on children and the unvaccinated. COVID immunization numbers have especially lagged among the state's communities of color, who sometimes face increased barriers to receiving vaccine. As of mid-July the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) said just 47% of Black Minnesotans were fully vaccinated, compared to well over 60% of the state's white residents.

The hair care businesses in Minnesota taking part are among 1,000 Black-owned barber shops and salons taking part nationwide. The program is building on the work of Dr. Stephen Thomas, who for 15 years has demonstrated how shops and salons can be critical and culturally relevant settings for health education and delivering medical services.

"Barber shops and beauty salons are a place to talk about a lot of things going on in your life — and health is one of them," said Dr. Nathan Chomilo, COVID-19 Vaccine Equity Director at the Department of Health. "For those who have yet to get their COVID-19 shot, we need to continue to show up with reliable information, address their concerns, and then continue to minimize barriers to getting their shot when they are ready."

Earlier in July KARE 11's Kent Erdahl profiled barber Teto Wilson and his shop, Wilson's Image Barbers and Stylists, who opened a pop-up clinic to offer vaccinations to his customers. To sweeten the deal he also offered 50% off a haircut to anyone who gets immunized against COVID.

Wilson doesn't judge those who are hesitant to receive the vaccine, as he was once among them.

"I think it just depends on people's experiences," Wilson said. "I said, 'No way, I'm not going to get it,' but there is a doctor who is involved with this project here and he kept coming in, giving me the facts and giving me the information; so I just changed my mind."

Wilson's shop is offering free, walk-in vaccinations every Friday and Saturday between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. through August 21.

Here are locations that are taking part in "Shots at the Shop."

Minneapolis

- Viral Beauty Barber Shop
- VIP Hair and Nails
- Tuesday Glover Hair Care
- Hue-MAN Partnership
- Wilson's Image Barbers and Stylists

St. Paul

- Twin Cities Beauty Salon
- Charlotte Hair Salon
- The Chair
- House of Hair-Downtown St. Paul
- B's Barbershop LLC
- Nextlevel Barbershop

Rochester

- Cashmere Lux Hair Salon

Savage

- Fadez Cuts Barber and Beauty Shop

West St. Paul

- ManCave BarberShop

All participating barbers and stylists receive a small grant, and are required to complete online training on how to provide factual information about COVID and the vaccine to their clients.

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) is partnering with Black Nurses Rock to offer financial and logistical support to barbershops and salons who wish to host on-site vaccination events.