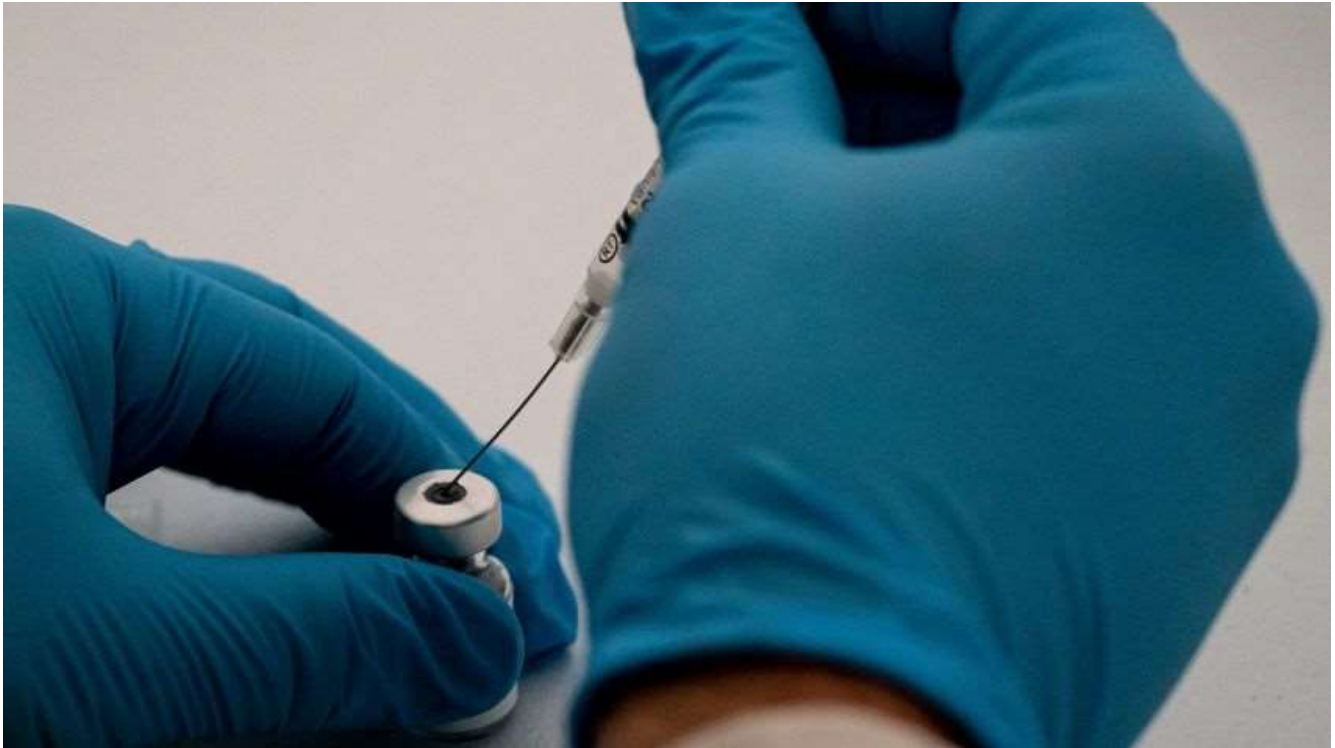


Health officials turn to Black-owned barber shops and hair salons as possible Covid-19 vaccination sites



CNN —

It's an effort to expand access to coronavirus vaccines: provide shots at the barber shop.

As part of a White House initiative, the National Association of County and City Health Officials is planning to help train Black-owned barber shops and hair salons to provide accurate vaccination information and even provide vaccines where possible, Lori Tremmel Freeman, chief executive officer of NACCHO, told CNN on Wednesday.

The Biden administration said Wednesday it is teaming up with several organizations – the Black Coalition Against COVID, the University of Maryland Center for Health Equity and the SheaMoisture company – to launch an initiative called “[Shots at the Shop](#)” to engage Black-owned barber shops and beauty salons nationwide in efforts to promote vaccine education and outreach on a local level.

The White House said throughout the month of June, each participating shop will help share information about vaccines with customers, display educational materials, and some will even host on-site vaccination events in partnership with local providers.

Months into the nation's vaccine rollout, [federal data have shown](#) that Black Americans' Covid-19 vaccination rates are still lagging behind those of other groups.

“The role that NACCHO's going to play is trying to match barber shops and beauty shops with local health departments, so that we can forge a relationship there and figure out if any of these business locations can also become vaccination sites or what it would take for that to happen,” Freeman said.

“In partnership, health departments may be able to work with these groups to provide health education to customers around vaccination or even supply a public health nurse,” she added. “Local health departments stand ready to work in partnership to leverage these critical trusted community members to address vaccine education, talk about any hesitancy or lack of information, and help facilitate getting vaccinations or clinics to these businesses.”

Several studies – published in the [New England Journal of Medicine](#), [JAMA Internal Medicine](#), and other journals – have found that partnerships with barber shops can benefit public health initiatives as well as the patients they are trying to reach, such as with [screening for diabetes](#), [monitoring high blood pressure](#) and [raising awareness around mental health](#).

Using the barber shop for medical outreach dates back to medieval times – when [barbers also were medical practitioners](#) who sometimes [performed surgery](#), often on those [wounded in war](#). One barber-surgeon, [Leonardo Fioravanti](#), even influenced the development of reconstructive surgery.

Fast forward to the 19th century in the United States, when [barbers were among some of the first entrepreneurs](#) and business owners in the Black community. In the post-Reconstruction South of the 1890s, Black-owned barber shops with white clientele were often [targets of vandalism and arson by white mobs](#), and Black barbers began opening more shops in the Black community specifically to serve black clientele.

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In the years to come, as racial segregation laws limited the spaces where Black Americans could gather, the barber shop served as a safe meeting space for the Black community. In barber shops, Black men could speak openly and honestly about a range of topics, including their health – and that seems to continue today.

Now, “it’s not uncommon for barbers and beauticians to be utilized in different ways in the community for spreading good health messages – that’s something we’ve seen happen a lot,” Freeman said, adding that the coronavirus vaccine “work is a natural extension of something that experience has shown can make a difference in how black and brown communities learn about the vaccine and get vaccinated.”