

Residents of Chicago's South Side were among the city's hardest hit during the COVID-19 pandemic. When the virus' second wave hit in fall 2020, St. Bernard Hospital and Health Care Center quickly activated its mobile unit team to travel throughout the community. Their goal? To provide comfortable, convenient care to patients in need.

By partnering with 20 local non-profits, churches, senior citizen facilities and other healthcare providers, St. Bernard's mobile unit team began offering COVID-19 testing to South Side residents. For those who tested positive, contact tracers would notify patients' family and friends. They would also provide care packages and food to help the patient's contacts quarantine safely at home for 14 days. Care packages included masks, sanitizer, thermometers and gloves.

Once COVID-19 vaccines became available, St. Bernard expanded its mobile services to offer the Pfizer vaccine to its network of community partners. South Side residents who were vaccinated also received care packages. When the Pfizer vaccine was approved for children 12 years and older, the team started serving schools as well.

"Mobile COVID-19 testing and vaccinations help people who can't make it to a medical facility get vaccinated and to get the answers they want about the virus," says Tzfeeraw Fairchild, mobile unit coordinator. "People are so glad that we are meeting them where they are."

During these community/mobile visits, St. Bernard staff uncovered an unmet need: Residents began asking if the mobile unit could serve homebound elderly and infirm patients who were interested in vaccination. The team regrouped and began vaccinating homebound residents of senior living facilities and residential homes.

More than 11,000 Chicagoans, mostly Black, have received a COVID-19 vaccine through the combined efforts of St. Bernard's mobile unit and the hospital's in-person vaccination clinic in its Ambulatory Care Center.

"We know that there are people who want to get vaccinated," says Diahann Sinclair, St. Bernard's vice president of organizational and community development "We just have to do our part to remove barriers that prevent people from getting the care they need."

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