

Request for Board Action Details

File #: 2021-450
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In control: Board of Commissioners
On agenda: 8/17/2021
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Title: Vaccine and Testing Protocols and Incentives
Sponsors: Human Resources
Indexes:
Code sections:
Attachments: 1. COVID-19 Vaccination Proposal, 2. Resolution

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
8/17/2021	1	Board of Commissioners	approved	Pass

Sponsor: Human Resources

Title
Vaccine and Testing Protocols and Incentives

Recommendation

1. Authorize the County Manager to expend up to \$1 million from federal Coronavirus response funds:
 - a. To implement an employee incentive program for all employees who provide information regarding receiving a COVID-19 vaccine or vaccine series.
 - b. To support any testing or auditing infrastructure that is required to effectively administer a program in which all Ramsey County employees are required to be vaccinated against or regularly tested for COVID-19.
 - c. Authorized expenditures can be made across multiple years consistent with the availability of each funding source used.
2. Direct the County Manager to implement a requirement that all Ramsey County employees are required to be vaccinated against or in absence of vaccination be regularly tested for COVID-19.
3. Require the County Manager to provide at least a thirty (30) day notice to all employees and the County Board prior to implementation of the vaccine or testing requirement.

Background and Rationale

On March 6, 2020, Minnesota reported its first case of COVID-19. As of August 11, 2021, the state of Minnesota has recorded more than 622,000 cases of COVID-19 and more than 7700 deaths. In recent weeks, the COVID-19 Delta variant, a highly contagious SARS-CoV-2 virus strain, was identified as accounting for more than 90% of all COVID-19 infections in Minnesota. Ramsey County is currently identified as an area of “substantial transmission” related to rates of infection while neighboring counties are beginning to move into more critical rates classified as “high transmission.”

Vaccinations began in December of 2020 under an Emergency Use Authorization and were rolled out first to those in long term care facilities, first responders and populations over the age of 65. As of April 2021, all adults and most recently, children over the age of 12 are eligible to get vaccinated. Close to 70% of Minnesota’s population has received at least one shot of vaccine. COVID-19 vaccines have been proven to be

safe and effective, and remain the best method of preventing transmission of COVID-19 and preventing serious illness, hospitalization or death.

In recent weeks, the federal government and the state of Minnesota enacted a requirement that all workers and contractors will attest to their vaccination status or be subject to COVID-19 testing requirements. Many private employers have enacted vaccine mandates.

In the coming weeks, Ramsey County will implement policy and process requiring all employees to provide proof of vaccination or be subject to regular testing, as well as an infrastructure to administer this process. Ramsey County must do its part and act to prevent the spread and further mutation of the COVID-19 virus. Ramsey County has a duty to protect its workforce and to continue to protect and care for our residents.

County Goals (Check those advanced by Action)

☒ Well-being

☒ Prosperity

☐ Opportunity

☒ Accountability

Racial Equity Impact

Ramsey County's workforce is comprised of 40% racially and ethnically diverse employees and our community is comprised of 34% racially and ethnically diverse individuals. The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted our racially and ethnically diverse communities. Data from Ramsey County's COVID-19 dashboard shows that residents who identify as Asian, Black, and Hispanic or Latino are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. According to the [Coalition of Asian American Leaders \(CAAL\) Report](https://caalmn.org/covid-19-report/), [<https://caalmn.org/covid-19-report/>](https://caalmn.org/covid-19-report/) COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted the Hmong community with 49% of the deaths within the Asian community compared to White residents in Ramsey County. Acting to prevent the continued spread will help to ensure that residents of color are not continually disproportionately impacted by the virus.

Community Participation Level and Impact

Ramsey County's Racial Equity and Community Engagement Response Team (RECERT) funded 15 community partners to conduct conversations in their communities to gather input and knowledge regarding the communities' perceptions of COVID-19, and what is needed in order to slow the spread of COVID-19 among the racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse communities in Ramsey County during the pandemic. A total of 49 conversations were held in multiple cultural communities in fifteen different languages and with over 1,500 Ramsey County residents between the months of November 2020 and February 2021.

Those who attended conversations believe that COVID-19 is a huge issue in their community, both for its health and economic impacts, and are active in taking precautions for themselves. The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impact on our communities of color, and has been compounded by preexisting factors, including poverty, systemic racism, and historical trauma. Communities want Ramsey County to: Take a stronger role in COVID-19 protections, education and enforcement; Take steps to specifically reduce the spread of COVID-19 in cultural and ethnic minority communities; Continue to support communities in mitigating the impact of this pandemic; and Build relationships and trust with communities to recognize and repair past harm.

In April 2021, Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health, in partnership with RECERT, funded eight community partners to host 19 additional community conversations to gather information about myths, fears and hesitations related to the COVID-19 vaccine. The conversations were intended to identify myths, fears, and hesitations that are specific to cultural and ethnic minority groups, and further to help Ramsey County better address these issues when engaging communities about the vaccine.

In addition, starting in October 2020, RECERT hosted monthly community conversations with Dr. Lynne Ogawa where residents and employees learned about the impact of COVID-19, testing and vaccine distribution, the science behind the vaccines, their safety and effectiveness, and protection against COVID-19 variants.

Based on this community input and direct engagement, the RBA's actions will provide greater protection to our community members who interact with Ramsey County employees and visit Ramsey County worksites. These actions are effective ways to keep our workforce healthy and safe while serving and caring for our residents.

☒ Inform ☐ Consult ☐ Involve ☐ Collaborate ☐ Empower

Fiscal Impact

Utilize \$1,000,000 from federal Coronavirus response funds.

County Manager Comments

Board action is required to authorize funds in support of COVID-19 vaccine incentives and to establish infrastructure to support COVID-19 vaccine status collection and to administer testing procedures. To ensure that our workforce remains safe and can continue to provide the best service to Ramsey County residents, the County Manager recommends the Board of Commissioners authorize \$1 million dollars in funding in support of the county's COVID-19 vaccination and testing policy and procedures.

This vaccine or testing requirement is specific to all Ramsey County employees. Planning continues regarding expectations for volunteers and contractors working with Ramsey County. The county will continue monitoring the implementation of federal and Minnesota state vaccine and testing requirements with the goal of consistent program implementation whenever possible.

To the extent bargaining is necessary with Ramsey County's collective bargaining units, it will commence upon passage of this testing and vaccine requirement and will result in a consistent, fair, affordable and transparent approach to implementation for all Ramsey County employees.

Last Previous Action

None.

Attachments

1. COVID-19 Vaccination Proposal to the Board of Commissioners Meeting on 8/10/2021