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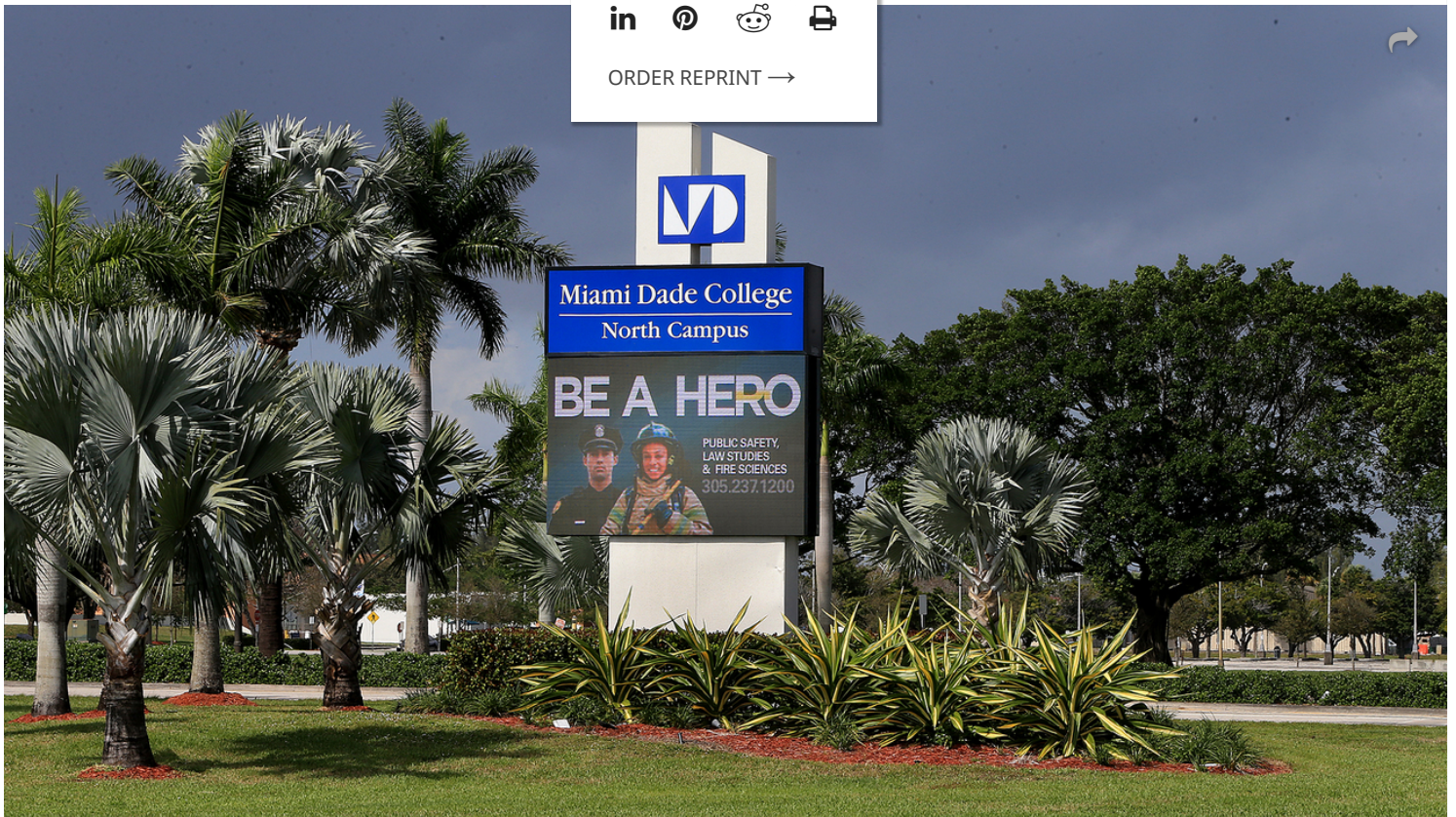
Federal vaccination site coming to Miami Dade College North as county's pace slips

BY DOUGLAS HANKS, C. ISAIAH SMALLS II, AND MICHAEL WILNER

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The Biden administration selected Miami Dade College North for the county's first federal 'mass vaccination' site for COVID-19. Tampa, Orlando and Jacksonville also got sites. BY [PEDRO PORTAL](#) ✉



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Miami Dade College’s North campus will be home to the area’s first federal “mass vaccination” site, a long-awaited addition with plans for enough supply to significantly boost the county’s current lagging pace of first-time immunizations for the COVID-19 virus.

The campus location is one of four federal sites announced for Florida on Friday by the White House, the latest effort by the Biden administration to have Washington directly involved in COVID-19 vaccinations instead of relying on a system largely administered by state governments.

Florida’s new federal sites would open March 3, the governor’s office said. On a call with reporters, Andy Slavitt, senior adviser on the White House COVID-19 response team, said the administration expected the sites to open “in the next two weeks.”

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“We are pushing ahead with plans to get more vaccines to more places to get more Americans vaccinated,” he said.

The MDC North site will take appointments for vaccinations 12 hours a day. The campus off of Northwest 27th Avenue near Opa-locka is the only announced federal site for South Florida, with the other three going to Tampa, Orlando and Jacksonville. Each site would administer 2,000 vaccine doses a day.

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That's equal to about four out of every 10 of the roughly 5,400 vaccines being administered on an average day across Miami-Dade, according to county figures. People need two doses to complete the vaccination process, currently limited mostly to people 65 and over in Florida. The latest figures show Miami-Dade sites, including state-run locations at Hard Rock Stadium and Marlins Park, administering about 3,000 first doses of vaccine per day.

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Along with the 2,000 doses administered daily at the federal sites, the Biden administration said it will deploy two mobile vaccination units in areas surrounding the sites. Combined, those units plan to administer an additional 1,000 doses per day, bringing the daily total to 3,000 vaccines administered by the new federal operation.

The federal sites will follow state criteria for vaccine eligibility. At the moment, Florida limits vaccinations outside hospitals to healthcare workers and members of the public 65 or over. A White House press release said the new "Community Vaccination Centers" would primarily use federal staff. It also said the centers will start out with "limited direct allocation" of vaccine supplies from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Currently, doses bound for Miami-Dade come through vaccine rations sent from the federal government to Florida.

View of the COVID-19 vaccine site run by Miami-Dade County located at Miami Date College North Campus where a new mass vaccination site will be opening next month, one of four new federally supported sites that will be operating in Florida. That will operate seven days a week, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. with about 2,000 vaccine doses available per day. , on Friday, February 18, 2021. Pedro Portal PPORTAL@MIAMIHERALD.COM

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OPPORTUNITY FOR NEARBY BLACK RESIDENTS

The office of U.S. Rep. Frederica Wilson, a Democrat whose district includes the new vaccination site, first announced the Biden administration's plan for the MDC North center in a Thursday night statement. Located in an area with a relatively high portion of Black residents, Wilson said selection of the campus was designed to boost the vaccination rate for the county's Black population.

““This all is coming straight from D.C. ... to help African-American people, Hispanic people, people of color access the vaccine,” she told the Miami Herald.

The White House said it selected Miami-Dade as a center in part because of the county’s high [“social vulnerability index,”](#) a measure of poverty and other factors that can indicate extra need after a natural disaster. The release cited Miami-Dade’s 18% poverty rate and said the county’s “vulnerable” population was lagging in vaccination rates. The White House said Miami-Dade’s vulnerable population has one of the lowest vaccination rates in Florida.

The latest state report shows that of the more than 250,000 people vaccinated in Miami-Dade, about 9% were Black. In Miami-Dade, Black residents account for about 17% of the population. About 62% of the people vaccinated have been Hispanic, which can include Black residents. Hispanic residents account for about 69% of the county’s population.

Vaccination rates in Miami-Dade show ZIP codes with high percentages of Black residents have some of the county’s lowest vaccination rates. That includes Opa-locka’s 33054, where 67% of the population is Black and fewer than 2% of the population had been vaccinated as February began, according to county statistics.

“We need to make sure that we vaccinate all communities because this virus does not stop on any borders,” said Opa-locka Mayor Matthew Pigatt. “It does not discriminate.”

STATE CONTROLS MOST VACCINE ALLOCATIONS

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis’ administration has controlled most of the vaccine supply coming into Miami-Dade County. Daily reports from the county government show a sharp drop in vaccines intended for first doses since the public vaccination process began in early January — from an average of about 6,500 per day to about 3,000 per day this week. The numbers are closer when second doses are added to the total — from about 6,700 vaccinations in all per day in early January to fewer than 5,400 per day now.

The north campus at Miami Dade College, 11380 NW 27th Ave., was already in use for vaccinations by the county government, which has been offering doses there on an appointment-only basis. Madeline Pumariega, [president of Miami Dade College](#), said the campus can handle the expanded vaccine operation, which she confirmed will start March 3. She said vaccine traffic will continue using the campus entrance on Northwest 32nd Avenue.

“We’re thrilled to be able to bring this to our community,” she said. “It gives us hope.”

The county also uses Tropical Park and Zoo Miami for appointment-only vaccinations but has seen a diminished supply of vaccine doses in recent weeks. The county’s public hospital, Jackson Health, and state-run sites at Hard Rock Stadium and Marlins Park have been the primary source of vaccines countywide.

A press release from the governor’s office said appointments at the federal sites could be secured through an existing state registration list. People can register for that list at myvaccine.fl.gov or by calling 888-499-0840.

This article was updated to correct the estimated starting date for the new federal vaccination sites.



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Medical staff gives the COVID-19 vaccine to residents with appointments at the Miami-Dade County vaccination site located at Miami Date College North Campus where a new mass vaccination site will be opening next month, one of four new federally supported sites that will be operating in Florida. That will operate seven days a week, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. with about 2,000 vaccine doses available per day. , on Friday, February 18, 2021. PEDRO PORTAL PPORTAL@MIAMIHERALD.COM