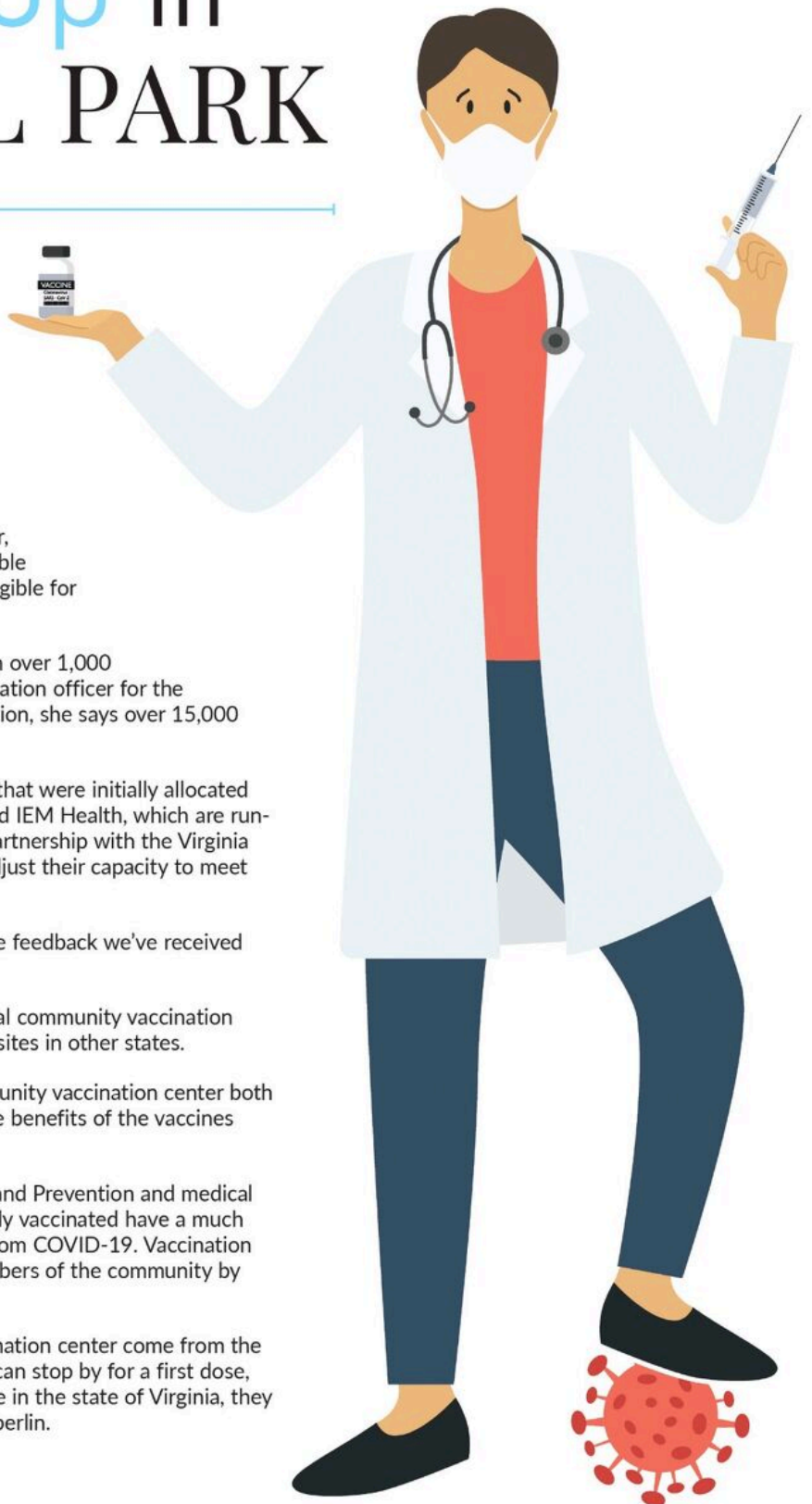


# Vaxing Up in CENTRAL PARK



WRITTEN BY SHAWN RADCLIFFE

The community vaccination center in Fredericksburg's Central Park is doing brisk business these days—with COVID-19 vaccines available to people 12 and older, the Pfizer-BioNTech pediatric vaccine available for 5- to 11-year-olds, and all adults now eligible for booster doses.

"We've had days recently where we've given over 1,000 doses," says Mary Chamberlin, public information officer for the Rappahannock Area Health District. In addition, she says over 15,000 doses total have been given at the site.

This is a big jump from the 350 daily doses that were initially allocated to the site. But Chamberlin says AshBritt and IEM Health, which are running the community vaccination center in partnership with the Virginia Department of Health, have been able to adjust their capacity to meet the increased demand.

"They've been wonderful," she says, "and the feedback we've received has been very positive."

AshBritt and IEM Health also operate several community vaccination centers in other parts of Virginia, as well as sites in other states.

People are drawn to the Central Park community vaccination center both by its convenient location and hours and the benefits of the vaccines themselves.

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and medical studies have shown that people who are fully vaccinated have a much lower risk of being hospitalized and dying from COVID-19. Vaccination also helps protect the most vulnerable members of the community by reducing the spread of the coronavirus.

Many people visiting the Central Park vaccination center come from the Fredericksburg area, but any state resident can stop by for a first dose, second dose or booster. "As long as they live in the state of Virginia, they can be vaccinated at that clinic," says Chamberlin.

She says Central Park was chosen as the site because “we felt it would best serve our community”—it’s in a high-traffic area and is easily accessible from both directions of I-95.

In addition, the center is open on weekends as well as in the evening on weekdays, which “has been very helpful for parents bringing their child to be vaccinated,” says Chamberlin.

While many people in the community are thankful for an easy-to-access vaccination center, some are not happy about the site being there, she says. Of course, “there have been detractors when it comes to the COVID vaccine since the beginning,” she adds.

Fortunately, Chamberlin hasn’t received any reports about protests or disturbances at the site. However, “there are some people who are a little more vocal now that the vaccine is available for children,” she says, “but we see that more on social media.”

Overall, the Central Park vaccination center has been helping to increase vaccination rates in the community.

“It’s such a convenient location for people, especially for parents with young children,” says Chamberlin. “It really is a wonderful facility, and again, we’re getting great feedback.”

The Rappahannock Area Health District includes Fredericksburg and the counties of Caroline, King George,

Stafford and Spotsylvania. Vaccination rates in those areas range from 52% to 56% of the population fully vaccinated.

These rates are lower than in Virginia overall, which has fully vaccinated 66% of its population. But they are higher than many of the counties in the southwestern part of the state, where less than 45% of the population is fully vaccinated.

A number of people in the Rappahannock Area Health District have also taken advantage of their eligibility for a booster—between 12% and 16% have received a third dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

Research shows that while two doses of the Moderna-NIAID and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines or one dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine are effective, the protection against infection may wane over time.

As a result, the CDC rolled out boosters earlier in the fall—first to adults with a higher risk from COVID-19 and later to all adults.

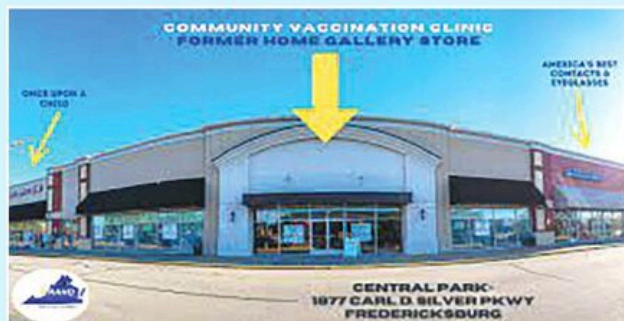
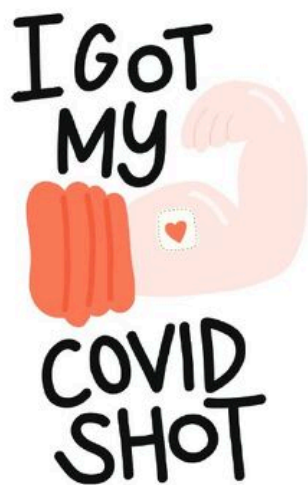
In addition, with the recent appearance of the fast-spreading Omicron coronavirus variant in the United States, the CDC expanded booster eligibility to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to access the booster based on their individual benefits and risks.

## Rappahannock area vaccination rates range from **52%** to **56%**.

Scientists are still working to figure out how well the COVID-19 vaccines hold up against this new variant, but they expect a booster to offer additional protection. Many researchers also believe that even two doses of the vaccine will provide protection against severe illness in the face of Omicron.

The Food and Drug Administration has authorized mixed boosters, so if you are eligible for a booster, you can choose any of the COVID-19 vaccines for your extra dose.

The CDC also recommends that people with a weakened immune system—such as organ transplant recipients or those undergoing certain types of cancer treatments—receive an extra dose because they may not generate a strong immune response from the initial series of the vaccine.



The Central Park community vaccination center is located at the former Home Gallery Store at: 1877 Carl D. Silver Parkway, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

It is open from **10:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday**. Walk-ins are welcome, but Chamberlin encourages people to schedule an appointment, in case there is a large influx of people coming at the same time.

Appointments can be scheduled online at [vaccines.gov](https://vaccines.gov) or [vase.vdh.virginia.gov](https://vase.vdh.virginia.gov). You can also text your ZIP code to GETVAX (438829) for English or VACUNA (822862) for Spanish to immediately receive addresses of nearby available vaccination centers.

People who have difficulty registering online can contact the Rappahannock Area Health District’s call center weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 540-899-4797. 