

## University of Montana Creates COVID-19 Vaccination Clinics

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With the development of COVID-19 vaccines, our country needs trained immunizers - and lots of them. Fortunately, the University of Montana Skaggs School of Pharmacy has been responding to this urgent call with students, faculty and alumni who can help curb the pandemic through their important work.

In 2020, the State of Montana declared University of Montana an official distribution and immunization site for the COVID-19 vaccine due to its excellent research facilities and unique ability to respond to the public health crisis. Along with Harvard and Oxford, UM was named one of [the world's top 10 universities helping to solve the coronavirus pandemic](#). Fortunately, UM's Pharm.D. program trains students how to immunize within the first two weeks of their study, creating more certified immunizers to meet the needs of the current health crisis.

Ken Chatriand, clinical supervisor of the Pharm.D. students volunteering at the UM Curry Pharmacy, has developed an efficient system for immunizing people as safely and quickly as possible. The Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness (PREP) Act authorizes immunization certified Pharm.D. students to vaccinate for COVID-19 under the supervision of pharmacists like Chatriand. Pharm.D. students are stepping up to be of service, volunteering for 2 – 3 hour shifts in the makeshift clinic, which is currently tucked into a hallway beside the pharmacy. The ever-evolving team immunizes up to 20 people per hour while maintaining social distancing guidelines. When the clinic expands into the first floor of the Curry Health Center next week, this rate will increase substantially.

Chatriand demonstrates his pride in the role pharmacists and pharmacy students are playing during this historic moment, but the amount of work left to do is substantial. When asked how he's holding up, he compares the complicated process of population immunization to eating an elephant. "It's a huge task," he said, "but we're getting it done one bite at a time...one patient, one vaccination at a time."

Katelyn Michell, a fourth year Pharm.D. student interning at Curry Pharmacy serves as the vaccination check-in coordinator. She consults her list when people arrive, confirming they have an appointment. Currently this means they're UM students, faculty, or staff on the 1A list, people serving in the healthcare field who are working with patients. If there's any room to spare, Michell adds walk-ins, but they must meet the state mandated guidelines for the current phase of treatment.

"We've had very few no shows," Michell said. "This is the first time I've seen people actually excited to get a shot." The clinic has been using Moderna vaccines, which come 11 doses to a vial. Once a vial is opened, all 11 of the vaccines must be used within 6 hours, so Michell helps to ensure the correct number of patients arrive at the clinic to guarantee that no vaccines go to waste. On top of managing the flow, she screens people for COVID-19 before allowing them to enter the clinic, and she directs them to a socially distanced seat that's completely sanitized between each use.

UM Pharmacy faculty have been preparing their students for this important work. Clinical Assistant Professor of Pharmacy Rachael Zins says, “We teach our students to be confident in their ability to administer any kind of vaccine. That starts with understanding a patient’s disease states, known allergies, or if the patient is immunocompromised.”

Immunizing for COVID-19 is not a speedy process. Even after patients are vaccinated, they must remain in their seat for 15 – 30 minutes while being observed for any signs of adverse reactions, such as anaphylaxis. Kirsten Ganaja, a third year Pharm.D. student volunteer in the clinic, explains these symptoms could range from difficulty with breathing to fainting, nausea, vomiting, or skin reactions. Ganaja hasn’t witnessed any adverse reactions yet, but she’s prepared to initiate basic life saving strategies if necessary because the Montana Board of Pharmacy requires BLS/CPR training as part of the immunization delivery certification process.

“I’d probably look for Ken first, just to make sure I had my supervisor’s help, but definitely, I’m ready to administer epinephrine if needed,” Ganaja said through her 3-layer disposable mask and face-shield provided by the School of Pharmacy.

Chatriand is prepared to increase the volume of vaccinations by developing a drive through immunization clinic. Patients will remain in designated parking spots for the observation period. He envisions this clinic as an opportunity to expand the University’s outreach to high-risk community members, perhaps older people who might not feel safe walking into a clinic. In the meantime, he and his students have been providing services to high-risk people by going to nursing homes and assisted care facilities.

The Skaggs School of Pharmacy is moving towards coordinating vaccination efforts in rural communities where appropriate facilities for storing the vaccine do not exist and where human resources for undertaking such a large endeavor are limited.

Director of Experiential Education and Clinical Assistant Professor Cherith Smith has started to administer the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines to Native American and Alaska Native students, faculty and staff. She wears many hats and has vaccinated healthcare personnel, elders, and high-risk populations at the All-Nations Health Center in Missoula with Pharm.D. students and faculty members assisting her.

“Students usually select the profession of pharmacy because pharmacists make a difference in patients’ lives,” said Marketa Marvanova, Dean of the Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Acting Dean of the College of Health. “During this pandemic, our students have the opportunity to provide essential preventative services and further demonstrate the impact that pharmacists can make.”

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University of Montana’s Skaggs School of Pharmacy is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education. Our Pharm.D. students have a 93% first-time NAPLEX pass rate and close to 100% graduate employment rate. For more information, contact us at [pharmacy@umontana.edu](mailto:pharmacy@umontana.edu)