

State Task Force is the Engine Driving West Virginia's Vaccine Success

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PHILADELPHIA - If West Virginia's successful vaccine rollout is a speeding car, then the Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF) is its engine – and the agencies on it are the pistons revving it up.

Once the COVID-19 vaccines became available, Gov. Jim Justice created the JIATF by executive order in December 2020 to map out a course of action for getting shots in arms.

Led by retired Adjutant Gen. James Hoyer, the task force included the Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR), the West Virginia National Guard (WVNG), the Division of Emergency Management (WVDEM), the Higher Education Policy Commission (WVHEPC), the West Virginia Hospital Association (WVHA), the Department of Agriculture (WVDAG), the Department of Education (WVDOE), the West Virginia Health Care Association (WVHCA) and the Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine at Marshall University.

Housed in the drill hall of the state National Guard headquarters in Charleston and separated by an array of plexiglass dividers, the task force members can quickly communicate and share information to make decisions on the vaccination effort. Lines of communication are shortened, allowing for more nimble responses to challenges.

Together, the group devised a strategy that focused vaccines on the state's seniors age 65 and above and its critical workforce, including healthcare workers and emergency responders. In addition, it came up with a hub and spoke distribution system that sends doses from regional depositories to pharmacies and county health departments statewide.

The result has been a vaccination effort that leads not only the nation but the world. To date, 11.7 percent of the state's population is fully vaccinated and more than 500,000 doses have been administered. Since the start of the year, there has



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been an 85 percent drop in the state's weekly coronavirus death rate.

"The JIATF's approach represents speed and efficiency at its finest," said Janice Barlow, Acting Regional Administrator, FEMA Region 3. "But more than that, their strategy is helping people in need , and FEMA is honored to be able to provide the resources to help ensure its continued success."

The task force has expanded to include the West Virginia Primary Care Association, the state Board of Pharmacy, the Department of Corrections, representatives from the Vaccine Administration Management System (VAMS), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

In addition to helping coordinate clinics to reach underserved areas, the task force is now focusing its efforts on getting residents registered to receive the vaccine. Call centers have also been established with state and federal staffers, as well as volunteer organizations, to get residents scheduled for their shots.

West Virginians can pre-register for their COVID-19 vaccine at www.vaccinate.wv.gov or by calling the West Virginia COVID-19 Info Line at 1-833-734-0965. Visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/index.html> for more information about the COVID-19 vaccine. To learn more about the president's efforts to combat COVID, go to <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/National-Strategy-for-the-COVID-19-Response-and-Pandemic-Preparedness.pdf>.

