



# Kent County Community Leader COVID-19 Vaccine Engagement Overview

December 14, 2020

## Introduction

One of the biggest challenges facing the state and nation is the need for an effective, accessible novel coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine. Kent County Health Department (KCHD) recognizes community members have varying levels of trust in vaccines and the institutions that provide them, rooted in a variety of historical and contemporary experiences. KCHD also recognizes that many communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 may be most wary of the vaccine.

KCHD takes these concerns seriously and is engaging the community in concerted efforts to ensure candid dialogue, transparency, and accountability in its vaccination efforts.

To ensure candid dialogue, transparency, and accountability to the community, KCHD asked Public Sector Consultants—an objective, nonpartisan, third-party consulting firm—to facilitate community conversations about the COVID-19 vaccine. Public Sector Consultants (PSC) conducted fifteen 30-minute interviews with 18 community leaders from the African American, Asian Pacific American (APA), disability, Jewish, Latinx, older adult, Native American, and refugee communities to solicit their input and perspectives on barriers and opportunities to vaccination in their communities. The interview guide is included in Appendix A. Following the interviews, KCHD invited participating leaders to a facilitated community leader forum to share PSC’s interview findings, discuss leaders’ perceptions of vaccination barriers, and receive an update on mass vaccination planning from KCHD.

## Interview Summary

Following are community leaders’ perspectives that were shared during the fifteen interviews with PSC:

### Perception of KCHD

For the most part, if KCHD has interacted with community organizations, community leaders rated those experiences well. Several of those interviewed are new to their roles due to needs created by the pandemic, resulting in limited collaboration thus far with the health department.

### Positive Feedback

Community leaders with more experience working directly or indirectly with KCHD had positive experiences overall, or said those interactions were steadily improving, even from less than one year ago. Those currently partnering with KCHD on programs stated they appreciate the department’s devotion to including marginalized voices in decisions about community health. They emphasized that KCHD’s messaging is consistent, succinct, and accessible. Many community leaders specifically praised Dr. London’s online posts and [videos](#) as informative and easy to understand.

**“The level of respect [KCHD] has for the community and the time they take is valuable and comes through to the community members. Often, health departments are only viewed when there is something negative—ours has been very proactive [and] has built credibility...”**

## **Constructive Criticisms**

Opinions regarding KCHD's communications strategy were mixed. Some leaders commented that KCHD overuses "evidence-based language" that sometimes bogs down their intended message, particularly when that message is intended as a request or call to action. Still other leaders advocated for more detailed information to be made available to the public on a regular basis, reasoning that people would be better informed to make decisions that fit their lifestyle and address their specific health concerns.

While several organizations presently provide contact tracing services on behalf of KCHD, some leaders shared community concerns that the health department is not doing enough to successfully trace potential virus spread. Community leaders noted that perceived lapses in such communication can compound distrust of government institutions and reinforce skepticism of KCHD's (and other agencies') motives for public/mass vaccination.

## **Community Members' Opinions of a Vaccine**

All community leaders cited safety and efficacy as community members' top concerns about receiving a COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available. Beyond those initial questions, community leaders asked KCHD to develop informational resources to help the public better understand how vaccines work and the need for mass vaccination. Many community leaders felt that COVID-19 information was constantly changing over time and between information sources. Certain communities (e.g., refugee and Latinx communities) struggle more than others to locate and access consistent information.

Representatives of Kent County's refugee communities described community members' eagerness to receive the vaccine. They said many refugees in Kent County are grateful for the medical care they receive in the U.S. compared to in their countries of origin and "are largely deferential to public health" institutions as a result. Asian Pacific American community leaders shared a similar sentiment of vaccine readiness in their communities, noting that refugees who were required to receive vaccines before entering the U.S. are familiar with the process.

## **Most Significant Barriers to Vaccination**

### **Distrust of Institutions**

Despite many positive perceptions of a newly developed vaccine, almost every community represented in interviews faces obstacles to understanding and/or receiving the vaccination when it becomes available. One of the most common barriers leaders mentioned is a deep-seated distrust of both medical and governmental institutions.

#### *Medical Institutions*

African American community leaders shared that many community members are skeptical of the motives behind mass vaccination due to recent historic trauma from experiments on African Americans.<sup>1</sup> A Latinx community representative echoed a similar anxiety on behalf of their community, stating that some people fear deportation due to their immigrant or undocumented legal status. While many community leaders said they would defer to their physicians' recommendations regarding vaccination, one African American leader specifically noted that KCHD is more trusted than local health systems by the broader African American community. Community leaders emphasized that, given the prevalence of systemic racism in medicine, KCHD must convince the public that when a vaccine is made publicly available it is, "not an experiment, but the real thing."

#### *Government Agencies*

In addition to distrust of institutional medicine, community leaders also indicated that some communities do not view government agencies as a source of trusted information or help. Community leaders noted that refugee, immigrant, and Latinx community members may be hesitant to receive the vaccine at government-affiliated sites, for fear they will be asked identifying questions that could incriminate undocumented family or friends. They also noted that community members may not trust governmental institutions if they have had negative experiences with, or were not offered health services by, these institutions in their countries of origin.

<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the study officially known as the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male, about which more information is available on the CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/tuskegee/timeline.htm>

## Language Barriers

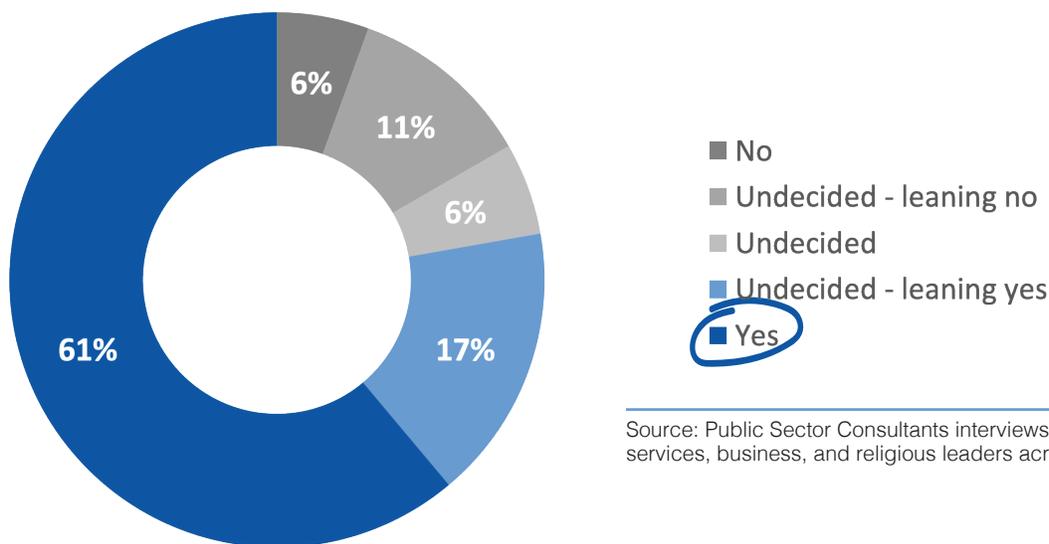
Leaders serving the Asian Pacific American, refugee, and vulnerable/homeless communities noted the array of languages spoken throughout Kent County by community members whose first language is not English, or who do not speak English at all. Latinx community leaders urged KCHD to translate all educational materials into Spanish for distribution on social media and in person at community gatherings and resource hubs (e.g., technology access and food aid). They felt reduced budgets for language translation and English as a Second Language (ESL) courses during the pandemic have hindered efforts to improve communication with these community members.

## Lack of Accessibility

Leaders serving vulnerable, older adult, and disability communities described the lack of accessibility as a potential obstacle to vaccination in these communities. A representative from the older adult community noted that some older adults have limited mobility and will need coordinated transportation to reach vaccination sites for both doses. Leaders representing the disability community advocated for physical accessibility at vaccination sites, encouraging KCHD to offer both drive-through and walk-up vaccination options. Those leaders also stressed the need for Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant educational materials, including closed captioning and sign language for any promotional videos or town halls.

## Community Leaders' Intent to Receive the Vaccine

Despite these barriers, a resounding majority of community leaders intend to receive the vaccine when they are able to do so, with several important caveats, described below.



Source: Public Sector Consultants interviews with 18 human services, business, and religious leaders across Kent County.

## Most Kent County Leaders Interviewed Intend to Receive the Vaccine

Most of the community leaders (78 percent) interviewed plan to receive the vaccine or are leaning toward doing so. All are willing to share their intentions with community members, and many were willing to receive the vaccine publicly or share that they were vaccinated publicly on social media, at educational forums, or through word of mouth. Some community leaders are prohibited from encouraging vaccination on behalf of their organizations, but these leaders said they could and would do so as private citizens.

## Health and Governmental Leaders Must Lead by Example

Almost all community leaders, including those who planned to receive the vaccine, said their decisions were contingent on public health, medical, and governmental authorities leading by example and being vaccinated first. Many leaders acknowledged that their communities are seeking the same leadership by example from them, and that their own decisions to vaccinate (or not to vaccinate) would encourage others to follow suit.

**“I would like to give my community peace of mind. I will take [the vaccine].”**

## Leaders Perceive Similar Risks, But Respond to Them Differently

Leaders who are more wary of being vaccinated expressed concerns about safety and efficacy, citing worry about the expedited speed of the clinical trials, the meaning of emergency use authorization, and potential political interference in the testing process as possible deterrents. Some who have already contracted the virus explained that their perceived immunity would limit their willingness to be vaccinated. Others noted that potential long-term risks of COVID-19 vaccination have yet to be determined, especially for those who plan to have children in the future.

**“Most people are hopeful. Most people whose doctors say it’s safe will take the vaccine. I am one of them.”**

## Best Ways to Communicate

Community leaders recommended numerous communication methods for sharing timely, important information with their communities. While many of them highlighted the importance of social media and digital communication, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the most commonly recommended communication strategies involved in-person conversations at community gathering places.

### In-person Conversation

Leaders across every participating community stated that in-person, word-of-mouth conversations are the most likely to assuage people’s uncertainties. People trust respected individuals in their own communities to best help them and have their best interests in mind.

### Community Gathering Spaces

Representatives from the older adult, Asian Pacific American, and Latinx communities underscored the importance of building connections with community members at community centers. When such gathering spaces closed during the worst of the pandemic, community members in need struggled to access essential resources and suffered the mental health effects of limited human interaction. Older adult community leaders specifically recommended holding conversations with and providing information to older adults at libraries and senior centers.

### Food Distributions

Several community leaders also recommended distributing information or administering the vaccine at emergency food distributions in partnership with Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank and their local agencies (pantries, shelters, and soup kitchens). Because food distributions are often hosted by local community-based organizations, people have come to trust these organizations for multiple types of resources. Latinx, Arab-American, and older adult community leaders described successfully identifying community members in need of non-food-related services and/or essential resources through emergency food distributions. Thus, dovetailing vaccination outreach or distribution with socially distanced group gatherings at emergency food distributions may increase participation and trust among these community members.

### Doctor Appointments

A number of older adult and disability community leaders mentioned that community members would likely trust information provided by their own doctors, especially if communicated during a regular appointment. Many older adults are accustomed to receiving flu shots and are less likely to contest advice from a medical professional.

### Involve Faith Leadership

Leaders across African American, Asian Pacific American, Latinx, Jewish, and refugee populations all strongly encouraged including religious leaders in future conversations as trusted resources capable of disseminating vaccine information. Especially in communities wary of secular institutional authorities, one African American leader said faith communities “engender a deeper trust than most people can understand from outside the community.” A leader in the African American community observed that “our familial and communal networks [hold] tremendous sway for us” and that if religious leaders were among the first to receive the vaccine, it would encourage broader vaccination acceptance.

## Establish Local Vaccination Sites

Community leaders want and are willing to host vaccine distribution at their respective locations (community organizations, houses of worship, etc.) to continue fostering trust and encourage widescale vaccination. They consider this like hosting flu shot clinics or precinct voting on election day. However, many community leaders were unaware that the vaccine requires ultra-cold storage, which is unavailable at most community organizations.

## Digital and Traditional Media

Community leaders were asked to list or describe the best ways to disseminate information to their communities through forms of media. When asked where and to whom community members turn for trusted information, some leaders provided specific sources, like the names of social media sites, text messaging services, local newspapers, and radio stations. The following exhibit depicts which forms of media overlapped across multiple communities.

Digital Media	African American	Asian Pacific American	Disability	Jewish	Latinx	Older adult	Refugee
Social media (Facebook, Facebook Live videos)	●	●			●	●	
YouTube videos							●
Text messaging services • WhatsApp • TalkingPoints							●
Website/email listserv	●	●		● ****	●		●

Traditional Media	African American	Asian Pacific American	Disability	Jewish	Latinx	Older adult	Refugee
Newspapers					● *	● **	
TV ads			●			●	
Radio stations					● ***		

\*Lazo Cultural, El Informador, El Vocero Hispano and La Voz

\*\*Grand Rapids Press

\*\*\*La Poderosa

\*\*\*\*<https://www.jewishgrandrapids.org>

# Community Leader Forum Feedback

## Overview

On Thursday, December 1, 2020, PSC facilitated a virtual two-hour session with 13 community leaders and KCHD staff. The community leaders represented Kent County's African American, Asian Pacific American, disability, Jewish, Latinx, older adult, Native American, and refugee communities. These leaders came together to share PSC's interview findings, discuss leaders' perceptions of vaccination barriers, and receive an update on mass vaccination planning from KCHD Administrative Health Officer Dr. Adam London, KCHD Deputy Administrative Health Officer Teresa Branson, and KCHD Medical Director Dr. Nirali Bora. In addition to PSC's interview summary and KCHD's vaccine update, PSC debuted an informational handout for broad community use that addresses key issues and questions raised by those interviewed. The forum agenda and informational handout are included in the appendices.

## Discussion

Many of those attending the forum understood and were unsurprised by most responses to PSC's interview questions. When asked about any surprises in the data collected, one community leader expressed surprise that people accessing emergency food are willing to receive the vaccine at the food distribution site but acknowledged that it may help address the barrier of institutional distrust. Another community leader was surprised by the potential barriers to vaccination some people gave, such as forgetting the second dose. Community leaders emphasized that consistent, clear education and messaging is needed to generally encourage understanding of how vaccines work and the need for mass vaccination, and to specifically remind vaccine recipients to get the second dose within the correct timeline.

**“What’s lacking is getting detailed information to the general public...[a] detail level that makes it personal—that makes me feel like it could affect me.”**

In addressing barriers to vaccination, attendees stressed the need for coordinated transportation to and from vaccination sites, designating trusted local sites as vaccination centers, providing in-home vaccination, and offering extended non-business hours for vaccination.

Most community leaders expressed appreciation for KCHD's approach to including community members in mass vaccination planning and listening to community members' concerns. Several, including tribal representatives and African American leaders, specifically thanked KCHD for directly addressing the historic trauma faced by their communities. All of them stressed the need to provide consistent messaging county wide. They also reiterated the need for ADA-compliant educational materials to address public confusion about vaccine release timing. KCHD acknowledged that it had been inundated by callers seeking the vaccine who were not yet eligible to receive it.

When asked how they can solicit input from, and provide information to, their own communities, leaders suggested a range of strategies, both interpersonal and digital. Some recommended holding individual conversations, focus groups, town halls, and in-office appointments (for resource organizations). Other leaders offered surveys, public service announcements, social media posts, mass SMS (text messaging) services, and automated messages on agency phones as alternative communication tools.

## Next Steps

As limited vaccinations become available for essential workers in December 2020 and January 2021, KCHD and PSC will work with community leaders to schedule and host additional community conversations with a greater number of participants across Kent County.

**For more information about ongoing efforts to ensure Kent County residents understand and are able to access their COVID-19 vaccination options, please visit: [vaccinatewestmi.com](https://vaccinatewestmi.com).**

# Kent County Health Department Community Leader Interview Guide

## Communicating with Community Members About COVID-19 Vaccination

### Introduction

One of the biggest challenges facing the state and nation is the need for an effective, accessible novel coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine. Kent County Health Department (KCHD) recognizes community members have varying levels of trust in vaccines and the institutions that provide them, rooted in a variety of historical and contemporary experiences. KCHD also recognizes that many communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 may be most wary of the vaccine.

KCHD takes these concerns seriously and is engaging the community in concerted efforts to ensure candid dialogue, transparency, and accountability in its vaccination efforts.

To ensure candid dialogue, transparency, and accountability to our community, KCHD has asked Public Sector Consultants—an objective, nonpartisan, third-party consulting firm—to facilitate community conversations about the COVID-19 vaccine. PSC is conducting a series of 30-minute interviews with community leaders to solicit their input and perspectives on barriers and opportunities to vaccination in their communities.

KCHD identified you as a public health partner and respected leader in the \_\_\_\_\_ community. While we recognize you do not represent or speak for the entire community, KCHD respects that you may be more closely attuned to its needs. Please feel free to speak freely from your perspective. Our efforts will also include engaging more community members.

This and other interviews will be used to identify outstanding issues and priorities about the vaccination distribution process and how best to communicate with leaders' respective communities. The interviews will also help guide a series of broader community conversations beginning the first week of December about how KCHD can partner with community leaders to address outstanding concerns.

### Interview Questions

1. How do you most commonly interact with KCHD?
2. How are community members discussing a COVID-19 vaccine? What information will these members want to know about this vaccine?
3. What are your thoughts about a COVID-19 vaccine?
4. When an effective, accessible vaccine becomes available, would you say that you are **not planning** or **definitely planning** to be vaccinated for COVID-19?

5. Who are the most trusted official and unofficial leaders in your community? With whom else should we speak?
6. How do you feel about your experiences interacting with KCHD?
7. One of KCHD's goals is to facilitate dialogue with community members through existing networks and communications channels. What are the best ways to disseminate information to your community? What role do you see KCHD playing in the dissemination of information about the COVID-19 vaccine? What role do you see for yourself as a community leader in helping to disseminate information about the vaccine?
8. Is there anything else you'd like to share?



# COVID-19 Vaccine: Important Facts

## Kent County Health Department

The Kent County Health Department (KCHD) Clinical Services Division is working closely with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to prepare for the forthcoming novel coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine.

### How do vaccines protect our community?

If 75–95 percent of the population is vaccinated, vaccines will protect people who have not been vaccinated by reducing the rate of person-to-person transmission (community protection). Vaccination has led to community protection from other illnesses, including whooping cough (pertussis).<sup>1</sup>

### Who is making a COVID-19 vaccine?

More than one pharmaceutical company may provide a vaccine, including [Pfizer](#) and [Moderna](#). KCHD anticipates a limited vaccine supply at first and will distribute it in accordance with CDC guidance and ongoing input from the community.

### Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe?

Like all medicines, vaccines can have some adverse effects. However, vaccines provide more benefits than risks.<sup>2</sup> Data from both Pfizer and Moderna clinical trials, with over 73,000 combined participants, demonstrate that the COVID-19 vaccines have been well tolerated by people across all participating ages, genders, races, and ethnicities with no serious safety concerns observed. The most commonly reported side effects of vaccination were fatigue, muscle or joint pain, and headache—all among less than 10 percent of trial participants.<sup>3</sup>

### How effective is the COVID-19 vaccine?

Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are 95 percent effective, a calculation based on observed infection rates among nonvaccinated (placebo) participants compared to vaccinated participants in each clinical trial.<sup>4</sup> According to Pfizer, “efficacy was consistent across age, gender, race, and ethnicity demographics,” including older adults.<sup>5</sup>

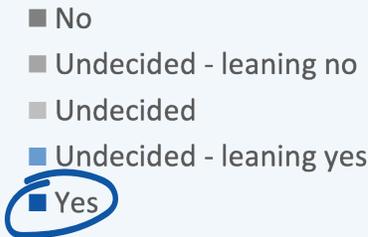
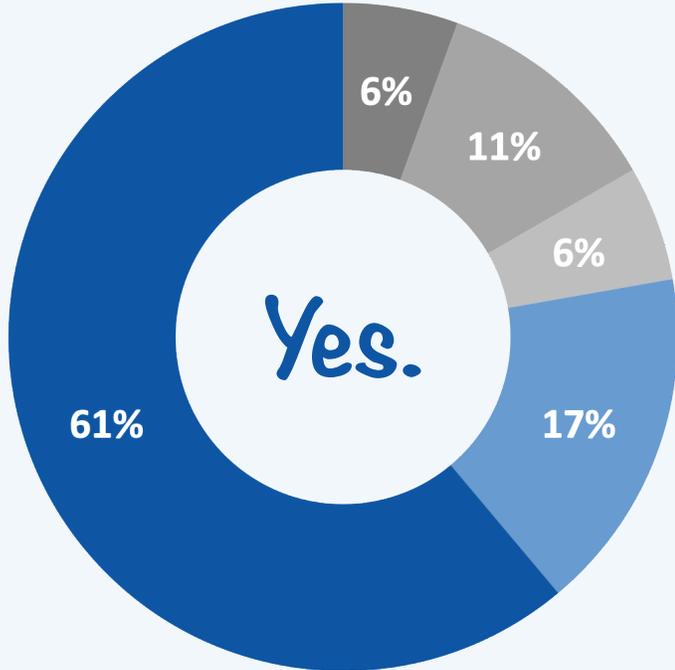
### Where can I get the vaccine?

COVID-19 vaccine storage and handling guidance vary by manufacturer but will require both cold and ultra-cold storage (-4° to -22°F and -76°F to -112°F, respectively). Once ready for distribution, the vaccine may be held at refrigerator temperatures for 24 hours and room temperature for up to six hours. Because of these rigorous storage and handling requirements, initial vaccination sites in Kent County will be limited. These sites will include health department clinics and health systems.

### How often do I need the vaccine?

The COVID-19 vaccine will likely require two doses over a specific time period. Individuals receiving the vaccine will need to return to the Health Department or the location where the vaccine was first administered to receive the second dose.

# Are You getting vaccinated?



Source: Public Sector Consultants interviews with 18 human services, business, and religious leaders across Kent County.

For more answers to frequently asked questions, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html)



**Yes!**

**NIRALI BORA  
MD**

**Medical Director**  
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**Yes!**

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M.H.A.**

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**Yes!**

**ADAM LONDON  
PhD, RS, DAAS**

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**Yes!**

**WAYMAN BRITT**

**County Administrator**  
County Administration Building  
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## Endnotes

- 1 Volker Vetter, Gülhan Denizer, Leonard R. Friedland, Jyothsna Krishnan, and Marla Shapiro. September 4, 2017. "Understanding Modern-day Vaccines: What You Need to Know." *Annals of Medicine*, 50:2, 110-120. Accessed November 23, 2020. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07853890.2017.1407035>
- 2 Vetter et al. "Understanding Modern-day Vaccines."
- 3 Pfizer. November 18, 2020. "Pfizer and Biontech Conclude Phase 3 Study of COVID-19 Vaccine Candidate, Meeting All Primary Efficacy Endpoints." *Pfizer*. Accessed November 23, 2020. <https://www.pfizer.com/news/press-release/press-release-detail/pfizer-and-biontech-conclude-phase-3-study-covid-19-vaccine>; Moderna. November 16, 2020. "Moderna's COVID-19 Vaccine Candidate Meets its Primary Efficacy Endpoint in the First Interim Analysis of the Phase 3 COVE Study." *Moderna*. Accessed November 23, 2020. <https://investors.modernatx.com/news-releases/news-release-details/modernas-covid-19-vaccine-candidate-meets-its-primary-efficacy>
- 4 Pfizer. November 18, 2020. "Pfizer and Biontech Conclude Phase 3 Study."; Moderna. November 16, 2020. "Moderna's COVID-19 Vaccine Candidate."
- 5 Pfizer. November 18, 2020. "Pfizer and Biontech Conclude Phase 3 Study."



## Agenda

### Kent County COVID-19 Community Leader Forum

Thursday, December 3, 2020 | 1:00 PM—3:00 PM

Webinar link:

<https://publicsectorconsultants.zoom.us/j/92442979095?pwd=Q3FnTkIRY3RaNnN4QlJPQlphSkVQZz09>

Dial: 646 558 8656

Meeting ID: 924 4297 9095

Passcode: 830479

Time	Agenda Item	Facilitator
30 mins	<b>Welcome and Introductions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce Health Department, PSC, and community organization representatives</li> <li>Review project purpose and background</li> <li>Timeline overview</li> </ul>	Teresa Branson, Kent County Health Department (KCHD)  Justin Fast, Public Sector Consultants (PSC)
30 mins	<b>Review Interview Feedback</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What jumps out at you? Were there any surprises?</li> <li>Do you think we've captured a representative portion of the community?</li> <li>What community values are coming through in these questions/responses?</li> </ul>	Justin Fast, PSC  Erin Lammers, PSC
30 mins	<b>Facilitated Discussion</b>	Justin Fast, PSC
20 mins	<b>Health Department Update</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide update on vaccine status &amp; KCHD operations for mass vaccination planning</li> <li>Review CDC guidelines and possible distribution logistics</li> <li>Highlight the West Michigan Vaccine Collaborative partnership.</li> </ul>	Dr. Adam London, KCHD  Dr. Nirali Bora, KCHD
10 mins	<b>Next Steps and Adjourn</b>	Justin Fast, PSC