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**Community Partners Come Together to Fight COVID-19;
4 Mass Vaccination Clinics Set for Arena in North Little Rock**

LITTLE ROCK — COVID-19 Community Vaccination Clinics will be held from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., on four dates in April, May and June at Simmons Bank Arena, 1 Simmons Bank Arena Drive in North Little Rock.

At a news conference today at Simmons Bank Arena, officials announced the dates for the large-scale vaccination effort to be conducted by the cities of North Little Rock and Sherwood, Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield, Simmons Bank Arena, Pulaski County and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS).

People will receive vaccinations on April 10, May 1, May 22 and on June 12. Everyone present at the clinics must wear a face mask. The clinics are prepared to vaccinate from 1,000 to 2,000 people daily. To make an appointment to receive a vaccination, call (501) 526-2211 or go to VaccineSignup.UAMS.edu/mobileclinic.

“UAMS has been to cities and towns in every region of Arkansas with vaccinations and testing for COVID-19, but we don’t go alone,” said UAMS Chancellor Cam Patterson, M.D., MBA. “Working together with the state’s cities, counties, insurers and nonprofit organizations, we try to ensure that none of Arkansas’ 3 million residents will fall through the cracks. All of us want to maximize access to vaccines in as many ways as we can.”

In addition to Patterson, speakers at the news conference included North Little Rock Mayor Terry Hartwick; Sherwood Mayor Virginia Hillman Young; Pulaski County Judge Barry Hyde; Alicia Berkemeyer, executive vice president and chief health management officer at Arkansas Blue Cross; Michael Marion, Simmons Bank Arena general manager; Maria Touchstone, English as a Second Language (ESL) director for the North Little Rock School District; and the Rev. William Robinson, pastor of First Baptist Church in North Little Rock.

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“I am excited to see our plans for a mass Community Vaccination Clinic in North Little Rock come to fruition and provide vaccinations for such a large number of our citizens,” Hartwick said. “A HUGE thank you to UAMS, Arkansas Blue Cross, Judge Hyde and Mayor Young for partnering with us.”

State Sen. Linda Chesterfield, whose senate district includes much of North Little Rock, Little Rock and part of Sherwood, said, “I’ve had a family member who died from COVID-19, so it is very personal for me. It is important that every Arkansan get vaccinated, and we can do that with vaccination efforts like this one.”

“Vaccine distribution continues in Pulaski County and across our state,” Hyde said. “However, in Pulaski County, fewer than 30 percent of our population has received at least one dose, and approximately 12 percent are fully vaccinated. All eligible vaccine recipients are strongly encouraged to receive a vaccine at the first opportunity.”

“While there is reason for optimism, we need to vaccination numbers to rise at a faster pace,” Young said. “We need to vaccinate more Arkansans, so we can maintain that promising outlook and protect the public from this disease.”

“As a school employee, the welfare of our students is a high priority for me,” said Touchstone. “I urge everyone who is eligible to receive the vaccine to take advantage of this opportunity.”

There is no out-of-pocket cost for vaccinations, but those attending the clinic should bring valid IDs and insurance cards if they have them.

“Making vaccinations available to all Arkansans is key to bringing the COVID-19 pandemic to an end, and we are so honored to be a part of this effort,” Berkemeyer said. “Vaccinate the Natural State has truly been a community and statewide initiative, emphasizing the importance and effectiveness of everyone working together with a common goal — to make the vaccine available to every Arkansan and help ensure that those in underserved communities and those with health disparities do not get missed. We believe that, while our focus is ending this pandemic now, the collaboration and connections rooted through this effort will help address statewide health concerns in the future.”

All Arkansans age 16 and older are eligible to receive the vaccine. A parent or guardian must come to the vaccine appointment with patients under age 18.

“As the eligibility for vaccination against COVID-19 has expanded, it’s increasingly important we do large-scale outreach and community vaccination clinics like this one coming up at Simmons Bank Arena,” said state Rep. Jamie Scott, whose district includes parts of North Little Rock, Maumelle, Sherwood and Jacksonville. “With more efforts like this one across the state, we can defeat the virus and earn a victory for public health.”

“One positive development to emerge from the pandemic is the way many of us are starting to come together like we are at Simmons arena,” Robinson said. “If our communities can continue to unite and expand on that spirit, then great achievements are possible in this fight.”

Simmons Bank Arena has a seating capacity of 18,000 and meeting and conference space of 28,000 square feet.

“Bringing the vaccine to everyone in every Arkansas community requires a big tent,” said Marion. “Our arena is that tent. We have hosted many types of activities, performances and celebrities, but few, if any, have had the importance of these vaccination clinics.”

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