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The Herald-Times

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COVID-19 booster eligibility guidelines spur confusion

Boris Ladwig
Bloomington Herald-Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

Last month, a state health official said any adult who wants a COVID-19 booster shot can get one, but what does that mean and how do you sign up?

People 18 and older who received initial vaccines from Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna can get a booster so long as their second dose dates back at least six months. Those who got a Johnson & Johnson vaccine can get a booster after two months.

The Indiana State Department of Health initially told the Herald-Times that it supports the administration of boosters to individuals who attest to meeting guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which are:

- Age 65 and older.
- Age 18 and older who live in a long-term care setting, such as correctional facilities, homeless shelters and schools.
- Age 18 and older who have underlying medical conditions, such as cancer, chronic liver or lung diseases, diabetes, heart conditions, HIV, weakened

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City, county commit $3.6M to address homelessness

Patrick McGerr
Bloomington Herald-Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

Efforts to combat homelessness in Bloomington and Monroe County received a boost with the announcement of more than $3.6 million in commitments from local government.

The news came as community leaders spoke about the next steps for "Heading Home 2021: A Regional Plan to Make Homelessness Rare, Brief, and Non-Repeating."

Led by United Way of Monroe County, the Community Foundation of Bloomington and Monroe County, and the South Central Housing Network, the initiative draws on support from the city of Bloomington, Monroe County, and Perry and Bloomington townships.

In addition to $1.2 million already committed through the city's "Recover Forward" program, Bloomington Deputy Mayor Don Griffin Jr. announced the dedication of an additional $1.5 million from the city to fight housing insecurity in 2022.

The Monroe County commissioners announced the county's commitment of $1.2 million in American Rescue Plan funding to Heading Home 2021, along with another $1.2 million to seed an endowment designed to ensure the long-term success of the initiative.

Many factors contribute to homelessness, and the 2021 Heading Home plan seeks to address everything from financial issues to health issues to systemic issues. According to Community Foundation CEO Tina Peterson, the plan should remove barriers and speed up access to housing. Initial steps may focus on gathering accurate, timely data about homelessness in the area to determine what needs should be focused on and to get that data to the community through a dashboard.

"Let's define what our metrics are," Peterson said. "We have a pretty good idea. But let's define what our metrics are in this dashboard, so that we as a community always know where we stand."

In her remarks, Peterson stressed the importance of community

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Trail cams spot animals on Sycamore Land Trust preserves

Carol Kugler Bloomington Herald-Times | USA TODAY NETWORK

Installing trail cameras on land protected by the Sycamore Land Trust was the beginning of a project that's provided glimpses of 37 different animals that live in the habitat. Next week footage from those trail cams will be shared with visitors to the land trust's website at sycamorelandtrust.org/wildlife. • Most days and nights, there are 10 trail cams operating along animal trails and where wildlife drink along waters' edges. One, labeled the Dam Cam, focuses along the top of a beaver dam, a popular walkway for many wildlife. Another is known as the Squirrel Log Cam.

TOP: A coyote seems to pose for one of the trail cameras set up on Sycamore Land Trust preserves. ABOVE: Three bobcats use logs as part of their pathway, as shown by one of the trail cameras. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY SYCAMORE LAND TRUST

Sycamore Land Trust staff and volunteers have been surprised by what the trail cams have documented, from a family of bobcats to a female turkey with her 12 offspring, known as poults. One camera captured two raccoons playing in a mud puddle during a rainstorm. The footage is in color during the day and shifts to black-and-white at night.

Having both day and night footage from the preserves provides a window into the wildlife community the land trust is protecting, said Kate Hammel, Sycamore's communications and membership director. "Our work is not possible without donors and supporters. This shows the community what they are protecting."

The first public viewing of the trail cam footage was during the land trust's virtual annual celebration in October. Some of the footage was part of the virtual presentation, and more was streamed after the main program concluded.

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Wildlife

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"We were quite surprised that people stayed on afterward to watch," Hammel said.

Most of the cameras have been placed on preserves that are not open to the public, Hammel said. The exception is cameras at Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve. All the cameras are on land within the Beanblossom Creek Bicentennial Conservation Area, which runs from the edge of Lake Lemon in Brown County, along Beanblossom Creek to the edge of Owen County.

"We were surprised and excited by the sounds that our cameras picked up," Chris Fox, land stewardship director, said in an email. "Listening to animals communicate with each other in this footage is fascinating. You can hear turkeys talking back and forth to each other. Quiet chatter between a doe and fawn. Hearing a bobcat kitten cry to their mom as the mom calls them to catch up."

Because bird can be identified either by sight or by ear, the birds heard and seen in the footage have been used to determine the species at the preserves. A pileated woodpecker, a red-shouldered hawk, a Cooper's hawk, thrushes, robins and grackles were all recorded.

"We were also excited about the amount of beaver activity we captured on camera at the Dam Cam," Fox said. "It gave new meaning to the term 'staying busy as a beaver.' ... It's shocking how much they can get done in a night, and it was really cool to be able to see them working together as a group."

A bobcat stops while walking past one of the trail cameras. PHOTO PROVIDED BY SYCAMORE LAND TRUST

The cameras were first placed on the preserves in the summer. As the season has changed, it's revealed differences in appearances, such as deer growing antlers, first in velvet and then without. Squirrels have become more active as winter approaches, as have the beavers.

Some animals are now recognized as individuals or families and staff have been able to better track their movements.

Besides giving insight into the wildlife that utilize the nature preserves the trail cameras are collecting information about the preserves as the land trust begins a large-scale wetland restoration project on 85 acres nearby. The project will remove field drainage tiles to allow an area on a current preserve to flood, with the expectation that it will remain flooded or marshy for most of the year.

Hammel noted adding wetland habitat in Indiana is more crucial now that state officials have allowed other wetland areas to be removed.

"While it is unfortunate that more wetlands in Indiana will be lost, our work is just as critical if not more," she said.

Wetlands and bottomland forests are already abundant in the Beanblossom Bottoms area, and the trail cams have provided a valuable look at the daily lives of wildlife there. The footage is helping to establish a baseline of what wildlife species are living in the area and will show what new species may eventually populate it after more wetlands are introduced, Hammel said.

"It helps us gauge and tailor our habitat restoration to the community that we're seeing," she said, adding it also gives the land trust staff information about areas of concern, such as where large numbers of deer may be overgrazing an area.

The footage shared on the land trust's website will be updated in the future, Hammel said. More images will be shared over social media as the seasons and wildlife in the nature preserves change.

Contact Carol Kugler at ckugler@heraldt.com, 812-331-4359 or @ckugler on Twitter.

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Booster

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immune system, obesity, pregnancy, tuberculosis and others.

- Age 18 and older who work or live in high-risk settings, which includes first-responders (health care workers, firefighters, police officers) and people who work in education, agriculture, manufacturing, corrections, public transit, grocery stores and at the post office.

The guidelines cover "nearly 97% of the 18-and-older population in Indiana," said Megan Wade-Taxter, media relations coordinator for the Indiana State Department of Health.

But Wade-Taxter also told The Herald-Times via email, "Anyone who is at least 18 years old and is six months or more out from completing their Pfizer or Moderna vaccine series or two months out from the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and wants a booster can get one."

However, signing up for a booster can prove challenging. National providers, including Walgreens and CVS provide boosters only with appointments, which can be scheduled at ourshot.in.gov or the providers' websites. To be able to schedule a booster, patients have to fill out an online form, which generally includes checking boxes that show the patient qualifies for the booster under CDC guidelines.

Walgreens, for example, allows patients to select that they are "at an increased risk of COVID-19 exposure and transmission due to their work environment, based on individual benefit and risk." But if patients who want a booster check the box "none of the above," they get the message, "Patient ineligible."

The CVS website allows patients to schedule a booster "if eligible," provides a link to the CDC guidelines and tells patients, "By selecting this, you're confirming the guidelines apply to you."

Walmart requires patients to fill out a form that also lists eligibility guidelines, and their category of high-risk patients includes current and former smokers.

To be sure, some of the language here is vague. How exactly does one determine "individual benefit and risk" or what constitutes a "high-risk setting"?

Penny Caudill, administrator of the Monroe County Health Department, said her priority remains getting people vaccinated who have received no shots at all. That's about 43% of eligible adults.

Caudill said she has been fully vaccinated and will get her booster when she is eligible.

She said she would not want to get a booster before other people have received their first dose, and while she said that she is not aware of any shortages of vaccines, she said time and staffing "is probably where the shortage is."

Boris Ladwig is the city government reporter for The Herald-Times. Contact him at bladwig@heraldt.com.

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