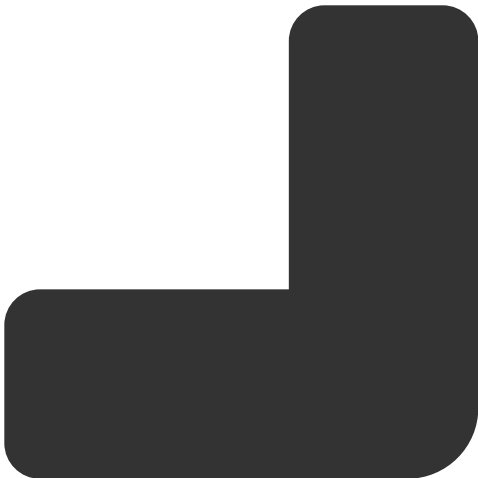
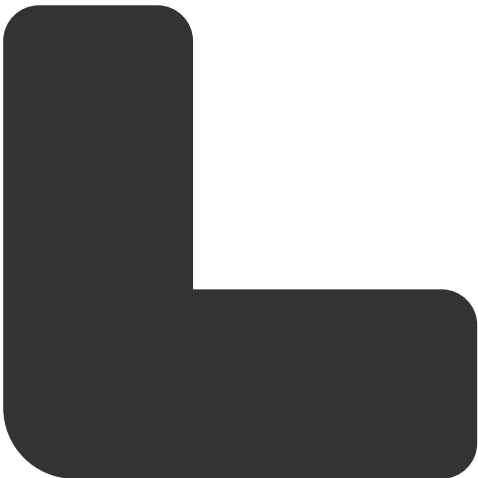


Workshop for seniors to address COVID-19 and vaccine myths





**Tonia
Harris**

When it comes to COVID-19 and the vaccine, there is still a lot of mistrust and skepticism out there, including in the Black community.

The Northeast Florida Area Health Education Center (AHEC) will host a workshop on misinformation about the coronavirus and its vaccine on Saturday, Sept. 25, at Derbyshire Place, 962 Derbyshire Road, Daytona Beach. It will be from 8 a.m. to noon.

The vaccine also will be available for those who wish to get it. The Florida Department of Health (FDOH) will administer the vaccine.

The endeavor is funded by Elder-Source, which specializes in health care for seniors.

The goal is to increase vaccination rates by offering free workshops to bust the myths and eliminate doubt about the COVID vaccines.

“We are educating everyone, primarily the seniors. We are still seeing the number of seniors vaccinated as really low. We want to give them facts, give them education and give them the vaccine,” commented Tonia Harris, executive director of Northeast Florida AHEC.

First in Volusia

AHEC has 10 branches across Florida educating the elderly on health care. The goal is to do more of these events in the area. Northeast AHEC serves from Baker to Volusia County. “We want to do this all over Volusia County.

This is our first one. We see a lot out there about the vaccine. We want to get people vaccinated, but we want to get them the facts,” expressed Harris.

Each session features general facts about the COVID-19 virus, the health impact and long-term effects; information about how the vaccine works in the body and possible side effects; facts and myths about the vaccine; and how to overcome vaccine hesitancy.

Most workshops also offer the opportunity for participants to get vaccinated onsite.

English and Spanish speaking facilitators are available to present classes in Flagler and Volusia counties.

Dispelling myths

The workshops are free, and churches and community organization leaders are invited to call AHEC to schedule workshops for their members.

“We are trying to get into barbershops and hair salons. We will start with churches and other organizations in the community, then we will branch out,” noted Harris.

“We plan to have a faith-based brunch to get with the leaders and let them know where we are and see if they’d like to schedule some sessions.”

Health care officials believe addressing myths about the vaccine and virus are key to stopping the spread of the virus and ending the pandemic.

Health officials are confronted with several myths when it comes to the virus and vaccine. They say myths include the following: what's in the vaccine, how it was made, its altering DNA, and more.

“We see and hear a lot of things, including the vaccine was made too fast, it wasn't tested and wasn't tested in the Black population, so people are scared to take it. We even had people tell us they want to take the vaccine but want to see what happens with others first,” Harris noted.

On reaching Blacks

Reaching the Black community is another goal. It's true that the African American community faces many health disparities and often mistrusts the health care system for various reasons.

“We see and hear a lot of stuff about the vaccine, especially in our African-American community. We want to educate everyone and get them the facts,” stressed Harris.

“A lot are hesitant to take the vaccine. In African American communities, there is an underlying fear of health care and a lack of trust. People don't just want to not take it, but they are afraid, and they have valid fears,” she noted.

The hope is that education will ease fears and get people vaccinated.

Harris emphasized, “Education is the key. Educating individuals empowers them because they know the facts. It then empowers them to make decisions about their health. I think that having the right education coming from the right people will go far.”