



Nation Outside



Nation Outside, Genesee County Sheriff Office Launch Vaccine Program

People in Genesee jail have option of getting one-shot J&J vaccine starting today

JACKSON — People housed inside the Genesee County Jail will have access to the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine on a volunteer basis starting Tuesday, March 16, through a partnership created by the Ambassador Program led by Genesee County Sheriff **Chris Swanson** and Nation Outside, a nonprofit led by justice-impacted people working for criminal justice reform.

“Jails and prisons have been hotspots for the spread of the coronavirus throughout the COVID-19 pandemic through no fault of the people who live inside them. The people there don’t have the option of social distancing and they often aren’t given the means to sanitize their living areas or to wear masks as recommended,” said **Johnell Allen-Bey**, Nation Outside’s regional coordinator for Flint. “That’s why we’re so glad that Sheriff Chris Swanson and the Genesee County Sheriff’s Office were willing to work with us to offer vaccines to people inside the jail to anyone who wants it, so at least they won’t have to worry about catching this potentially fatal virus on top of the other concerns they face.”

Since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, criminal justice reform advocates around the state have called for greater measures to protect people who are incarcerated from the virus that causes COVID-19. To date, 139 people incarcerated in state prisons and four Michigan Department of Corrections workers have died of COVID-19. Figures for jails — operated by counties rather than the state — are harder to find. The CDC issued [extensive guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in prison and jail settings](#), but advocates and people who are incarcerated have said throughout the crisis that the state of Michigan and counties have fallen short of those guidelines in several ways,

such as not providing enough soap or hand sanitizer to keep hands clean, not providing enough masks and not thinning prison populations enough to allow people to socially distance. That has put both incarcerated people and prison and jail staff at risk.

Fortunately, vaccines are becoming widely available. As of Monday, [20 percent of Michiganders](#) had received at least one dose of a COVID vaccine, and nearly 12 percent were fully vaccinated. It's significant that the Johnson & Johnson vaccine will be used in the Genesee County Jail program, as it's a one-shot vaccine, eliminating the need for a follow-up appointment for people who may be released from jail soon after their first shot.

At the same time that vaccines are being rolled out, COVID variants such as the UK variant that is 50 percent more contagious and believed by some scientists to be [32 percent to 100 percent more lethal](#) are gaining hold in our state. The race is on to vaccinate more people before the variants become dominant in our state and claim more lives.

"It could be your son or daughter in here so it's important to protect our family and friends who are in jail," Sheriff Swanson said. "I will always do my part to protect the people in our community."

Genesee County is believed to be the first county in Michigan to create a vaccine program for its county jail. Nation Outside Jackson Coordinator **Tony Gant** hopes other counties will follow Sheriff Swanson's lead.

"There are no drawbacks to making this vaccine available to people in our county jails," Gant said. "Whether they are serving a sentence or are just there because they couldn't meet the demands of cash bail, these are people who will be coming home to our communities. It only makes sense to bring them home healthy. It protects their family and neighbors, and it protects the jail staff who work in close proximity to them on a daily basis. We're grateful for the leadership of Sheriff Swanson, and we look forward to partnering with other counties who want to protect public health."

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Nation Outside (www.nationoutside.org) is an organization working for criminal justice reform that is led by people who have been directly impacted by the criminal justice system. Nation Outside uses community education strategies and civic engagement initiatives to inspire members and the community to get involved in knowledgeable, sustainable, and socially just forms of advocacy to support currently and formerly incarcerated folks, their loved ones, and their communities in order to inspire and create real reform in the criminal justice system. Safe & Just Michigan is currently the financial sponsor of Nation Outside.