

Apr 08 2022 2:21 pm

Office of the

Board of Health

City Hall
718 Main Street
Fitchburg, Massachusetts 01420
978-829-1870

This was a regular meeting of the Board of Health held at the Legislative Building at 700 Main Street and recorded by FATV Studios, Fitchburg, on March 3, 2022. The meeting was called to order by Dr. Bogdasarian.

Present: Stephen Curry, Director, Dr. John Bogdasarian, Chair, Sandra Knipe, Ian Murray, Robert Jokela, Superintendent, Jacquelyn Wehtje, Tiffany Michaud, Petitioner, Dina Hammad, Resident, Jean Robbie, Resident,

Order Review: Superintendent Robert Jokela:**Order #2021-3 Mandating Vaccination and Testing in Fitchburg Public School:**

Superintendent Jokela stated the testing for the extracurricular programming & the masking at school now is optional. This was decided a couple weeks back. In regards to the Board of Health order #4 which required the testing of students and staff in extracurricular programming Superintendent Jokela recommends that testing become voluntary and encouraged with the exception for the boys athletic teams who are currently in the playoffs. The boys' basketball plays tonight in Norwood and the hockey team plays Saturday night and when the playoff's end the extracurricular or the athletics for the spring should just be encouraged voluntarily not mandatory. The incidence of COVID-19 in the community has substantially decreased from when the order was put into place.

Superintendent Jokela stated his recommendation is with the decrease in COVID cases in Fitchburg he will support the Board of Health in amending order# 4 whereby mandated PCR safety check testing will only continue for the high school boys athletic teams basketball and hockey until their playoff tournaments and the school department continues to encourage weekly PCR safety check testing for all students in extracurricular activities and spring athletic. Masks will be optional for any staff or student in extracurricular activity for the remainder of the school year.

Dr. Bogdasarian asked if masking is still optional with the teachers and staff.

Superintendent Jokela stated that it is still optional.

Dr. Bogdasarian made a motion to accept Superintendent Jokela's recommendation with regard to testing for the extracurricular after the playoffs end order #3. Motion was 2nd by Sandra Knipe. All were in favor, motion carries.

Order# 2021-4 Mandating Testing for Fitchburg Public Schools:

Sandra Knipe made a motion to sustain order #4. Motion was 2nd by Dr. Bogdasarian. All were in favor, motion carries.

Public Comment Section

Dr. Bogdasarian will call upon the virtual comments first with a 2 minute time limit.

Jeanne Robbie, resident in Fitchburg, is against mandating vaccinations in the FPS.

Mr. Curry reiterated to Ms. Robbie that order #3 has been rescinded.

Tiffany Michaud, parent of 2 children in the FPS, stated she is against testing in the schools. Testing every week is abuse & testing a healthy individual for an illness that they do not have is abuse. This is violating people's constitutional rights.

Gina Giacosa, parent of 3 children in the FPS, stated the COVID test and the rapid antigen tests used in the schools have just been issued a warning by poison control that the chemicals on them that you're putting in your body every time you use the test.

Jacquelyn Wehtje, Fitchburg resident stated it's unfortunate that you went and voted on measures without receiving any public comment although you listed a public comment period that shows how authoritarian the Board is. Ms. Wehtje stated she had prepared her comments in response to the Michaud petition but will redirect towards the order mandating vaccination and testing for the FPS staff. If it's part of a union contract who says they're going to have it in their union contract next year, why don't you remove this? The President and the CDC have said we should be recognizing that this is an endemic disease and moving to normal. You shouldn't have to obsessively take COVID tests to engage in regular activities and neither should your school employee'. This should be a matter of choice.

Jeanne Robbie, resident in Fitchburg stating she is requesting the Board to prove to her the proof they have that there is an medical emergency in this state and in this country as well as proof that COVID is extremely dangerous and proof that the PCR tests are safe.

Mr. Curry stated that Ms. Robbie needs to put that in writing and submit to the BOH.

Dr. Bogdasarian will call upon the virtual comments with a 2 minute time limit.

Catherine Vitale, stated she feels that the testing is dangerous and the vaccines are dangerous. They are under emergency use authorization and you have no right to mandate them. You will be held accountable if you continue these unlawful mandates and you should probably look up the rules for open meeting laws because you cannot cut people off when they're talking to you. The Public session is for the Board to listen, not argue with the people that came to speak, you're supposed to listen.

Jessica Jacobson stated the Board should be ashamed. This involves the parents and the School Committee. She wasn't notified by anyone and just found out about this meeting now. She has no idea what was decided that involves our children but you're taking our rights away as parents. We were not notified and you're not involving the school committee. You can't mandate anything without parent consent. This was not on the school board meeting or any of their agendas.

Mr. Curry informed the audience that these meetings are posted online and on the City of Fitchburg web page and have always been posted there and has been determined to be the legal means for posting meeting in the City of Fitchburg.

Dr. Bogdasarian stated there are no mandates. The Superintendent of schools was here earlier made the recommendations and the recommendation was accepted.

Shanna Elle, stated she is asking for clarification because she was under the impression that the teachers and the staff were being mandated by the vaccine. She is a mother of a vaccine injured child and the problem is that people don't want to recognize vaccine injuries and that they happen and they're not rare and they're happening a lot more than people realize.

Tiffany Pembert, asked if any of the Board members have read any of the 9 pages of the side effects released by Pfizer.

Mr. Curry stated the City of Fitchburg as an employer has the right to make their employees mandated to test or to vaccinate.

Dina Hammad, Fitchburg resident stated she feels the issue is communication. It sounds like nobody really knows what's going on as you can see most parents if not all don't want mandates anymore and you shouldn't be telling them what to put in their bodies when to test and when to get a vaccine. Ms. Hammad understands that the BOH wants to keep everybody safe, but it's not their place. If someone wants to go get a test then go get a test if someone wants to get a vaccination they get a vaccination. The residents in Fitchburg and all around the world don't want it anymore, they don't want the mandate.

Mr. Curry stated there are two Board of Health orders in place; Order #4, mandating testing in the Fitchburg Public School for students and staff participating in extracurricular Activities. Order #3 was a mandate for testing and vaccination for Fitchburg Public School employees. Mr. Curry stated order# 4 has been modified and amended to no longer be a mandate.

Ms. Hammad stated this is what people wanted to hear and understand exactly what's happening.

Public Forum ended at 5:55.

Meeting Minutes:

Ms. Knipe made a motion to approve the February 3, 2022 meeting minutes. Dr. Bogdasarian 2nd the motion. All were in favor, motion carries. Ian Murray abstained.

Ms. Knipe stated there was not a 2nd on the motion to adjourn in the February 17, 2022 meeting. Dr. Bogdasarian stated he did 2nd the motion. Mr. Knipe made a motion to approve the February 17, 2022 meeting minutes as amended. Motion was 2nd by Ian Murray. All were in favor, motion carries.

COVID-19 Updates: Vaccinations, testing and tracing:

Mr. Curry stated the positivity rate from February 13th – February 26, 2022 for the City of Fitchburg is 3.4%. 92 cases within a two week period and 2,742 tests. There are 62 active cases in the city. Out of the 62 cases 13 of the cases are under the age of 18, 6 cases under 5 years old and 43 are equal to age 18 or greater at the moment.

We've had 17 cases in the last week, 215 in the last month and 2,957 confirmed cases since January 1, 2022. There have also been a report of 16 deaths since the beginning of the year.

Vaccination information and data. See Exhibit 1.

Mr. Curry stated COVID-19 testing will continue at the Fitchburg Airport until March 31st. There will be pop up clinics for vaccinations. Residents can check the city website for information and updates.

MA Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD) discussion: Service Complaint Response/Position Statement:

Mr. Curry stated a response was prepared this week and submitted to the MA Commission Against Discrimination as well as a copy was forwarded today to the Board members and a written response also served to the complainant per the requirements of MCAD.

Michaud Petition: to rescind Order #2021-4 Mandating Testing for FPS (Extra Curricular Activities)

Mr. Curry asked Ms. Michaud if she wished to speak further on her petition since it was already amended from a mandate. Ms. Michaud stated she does not.

Ms. Knipe made a motion to adjourn. Motion was 2nd by Ian Murray. All were in favor. Motion carried.

Next meeting scheduled for April 7, 2022.

Meeting adjourned at 6:00pm.

Exhibit 1

Fitchburg

Monthly vaccination update and interpretation of COVID-19 vaccination data as of 2/8/2022.

SUMMARY

Current Rates	
First dose = 76%	
Fully Vaccinated = 65%	
Boosted = 55%	
9,656 unreported	



TRENDS

First dose, fully vaccinated, and booster trends over the last two months

- First dose rates have increased 6% (5% statewide) over the past two months, with the weeks of 1/18 and 1/25 showing the greatest number of new doses given.
- Fully Vaccinated rates have increased 6% (4% statewide) over the past two months, with an increase beginning in January, possibly driven by the Omicron spike.
- Booster rates dropped off over the last two weeks, after steadily climbing throughout December.



DEMOGRAPHICS

First dose vaccination rates and two-month trends by race/ethnicity and age group

- White residents make up the largest number of unvaccinated individuals followed by Hispanic residents
- Hispanic residents' vaccination rates have increased 6% in the past two months
- 5-11-year-old and 20-29-year-old age groups have the lowest vaccination rates and make up the largest population of unvaccinated residents by age group.
- While a majority of Fitchburg's unvaccinated population is White, a disproportionate number are Hispanic
- The Northern area and areas near Fitchburg State University are the areas within the community where the locations where vaccinations rates are lowest.



GEOGRAPHIES

First dose vaccination rates across census block groups

*First dose and fully vaccinated rates calculated using 5+ population
 Booster rate calculated using fully vaccinated residents eligible for a booster dose
 Unreported/Unvaccinated include those individuals who may not be vaccinated or may not be present in the MHS system*

Fitchburg

Key Insights:

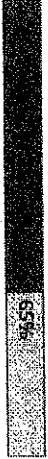
- Two-month trends for fully vaccinated and first dose rates; have been steadily increasing, with peaks for new first doses in the middle of January, corresponding to the Omicron spike in cases.
- Booster doses have dropped off from a peak in mid-January.

Data for Fitchburg as of 2/8/2022

First Dose Rate



Fully Vaccinated Rate

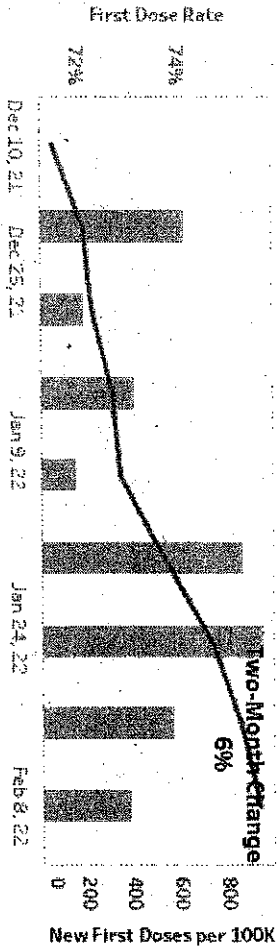


Booster Rate

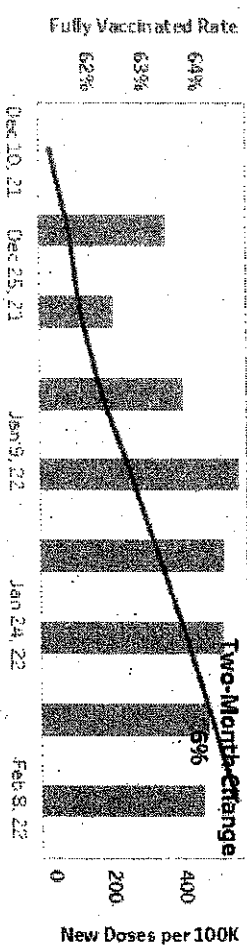


9,656 residents remain unvaccinated out of an eligible 39,564 residents

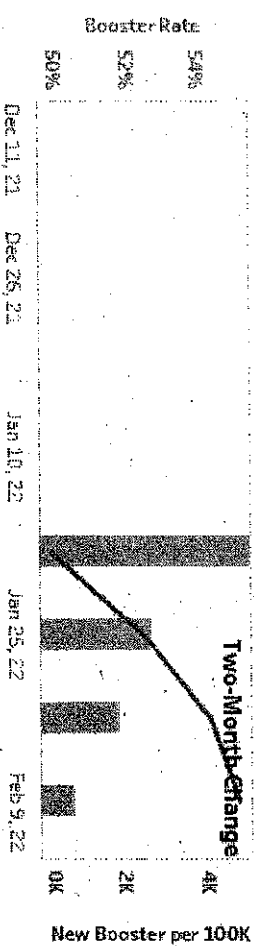
First Dose Trend



Fully Vaccinated Trend



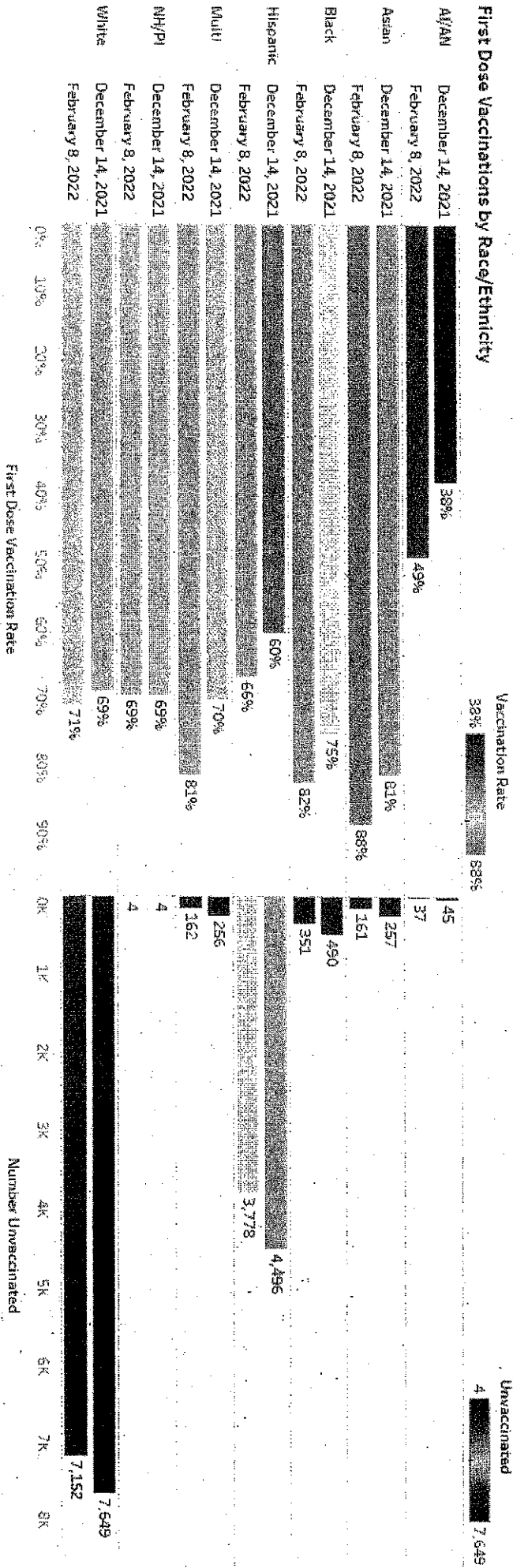
Booster Trend



Fitchburg

Key Insights:

- White residents make up the largest number of unvaccinated individuals followed by Hispanic residents
- Hispanic residents' vaccination rates¹ have increased 6% in the past two months

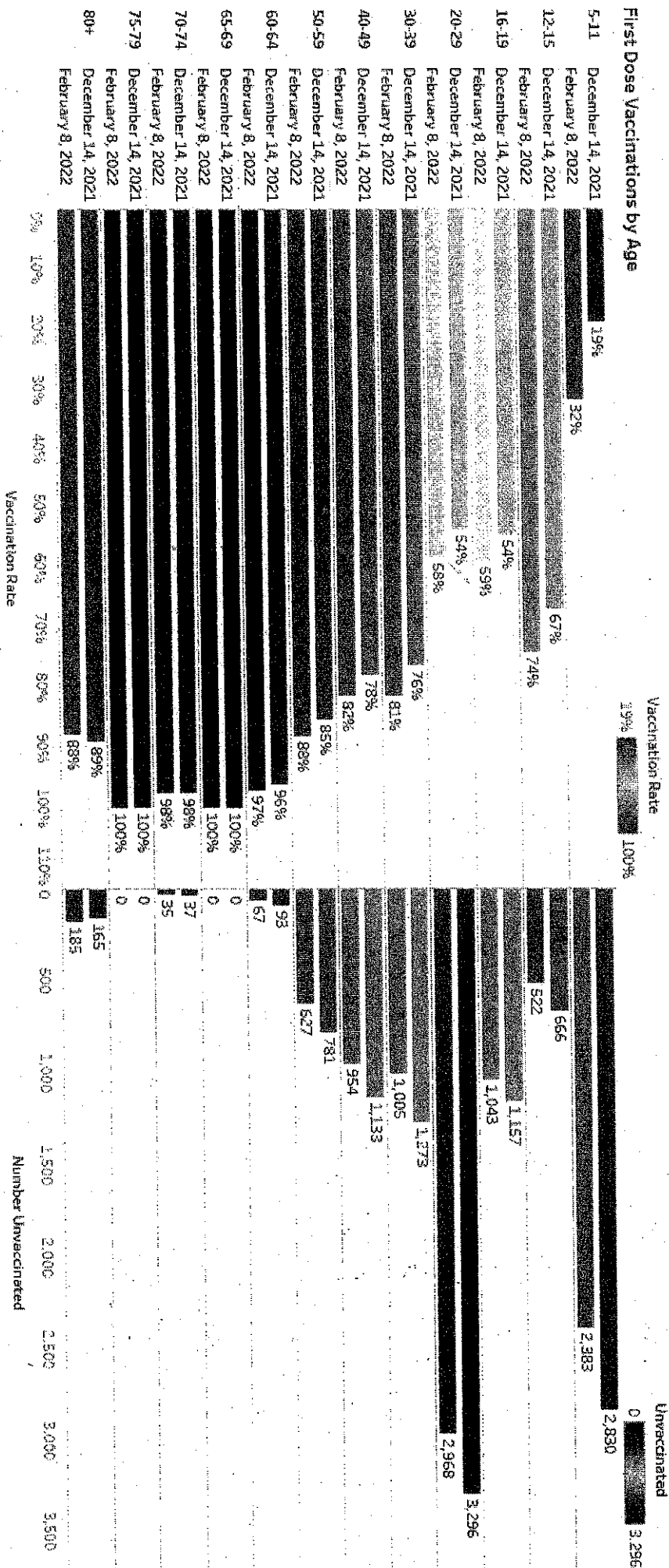


AI/AN, American Indian, Alaska Native
 NH/PI, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander

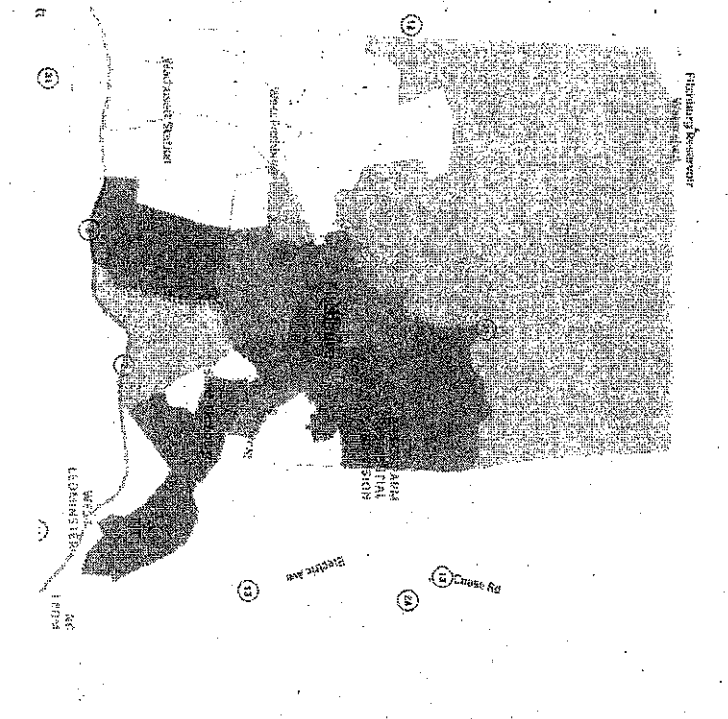
Fitchburg

Key Insights:

- 5-11-year-old and 20-29-year-old age groups have the lowest vaccination rates and make up the largest population of unvaccinated residents by age group.



Fitchburg—vaccination rates by census block group



- Greater than state total (82%)
- ▨ Less than 10pp below state total
- ▧ Between 10pp and 20pp below state total
- ▦ Between 20pp and 30pp below state total
- Greater than 30pp below state total

City/town population: **42,123**

% of city/town residents vaccinated: **66%**

% of state residents vaccinated: **82%**

% vaccinations not mapped?: **5%**

*Data as of 11/30

1. Vaccinated refers to individuals who have received at least one dose of existing COVID-19 vaccines. Data as of November 30. MIIIS is incomplete and does not necessarily capture each vaccine dose administered in Massachusetts. Only those vaccine doses that are reported in MIIIS are captured through this data. Some entities, such as VA hospitals, are not included in MIIIS.
2. % vaccinations not mapped refers to the percentage of vaccination records within a city/town for whom a vaccination was recorded in MIIIS but did not return a mappable address.

Source: MIIIS (as of 11/30), US Census Bureau 2019 Census Block Group ACS 5-Year Estimates; UMass Donahue Institute 2019 Population Estimates of Cities/Towns