New CDC tools aim to ease COVID-19 vaccine hunt

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What's the news: With the pace of COVID-19 vaccination slowing and supply outpacing demand in many areas, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has launched new web and texting tools to make it easier for patients to find vaccine appointments and get answers to questions they may have about SARS-CoV-2 vaccination.

The CDC’s new website, Vaccines.gov, allows users to find nearby vaccination sites and answers frequent questions about COVID-19 vaccine safety, cost, side effects and more. The website also details how sites offering vaccinations can apply to have their information listed on the website’s vaccine finder tool. The website also is available in Spanish at Vacunas.gov.

Users can text their ZIP code to GETVAX to get an automatically generated response listing three potential vaccination sites. There is a Spanish text-messaging option as well—VACUNA.

Why it’s important: While a majority of American adults have received at least one COVID-19 vaccination dose, nearly 40% tell pollsters from the Kaiser Family Foundation that they will wait and see about getting vaccinated (17%), will only get one if required (7%), or definitely will not get one (13%).

It remains unclear what vaccination rate is needed to achieve herd immunity against SARS-CoV-2, but the 61% of Americans who say they’ve already been immunized or will get vaccinated soon appears to fall short of the mark.

The Biden administration is encouraging that states supply more vaccines to primary care physicians’ offices in a bid to address immunization inequities and better reach patients who are hesitant to get vaccinated against COVID-19. It’s a move that comes as physicians are being urged to contact their patients by whatever means available and strongly recommend SARS-CoV-2 immunization.

The Biden administration believes the supply of vaccines to physician offices will increase and they want physicians to register to become a COVID-19 vaccination provider. If you are part of a health
system, reach out to your health system point of contact about whether your system is already enrolled or would be interested in enrolling. If you are a physician in independent practice and are interested, contact your state or local immunization program.

Studies have found that a doctor’s strong recommendation “is closely correlated with vaccination,” the CDC says. Meanwhile, 30% of adults now hesitant to get vaccinated against COVID-19 say they would be likelier to do so if the vaccine were offered to them “during a routine medical visit,” says the agency.

Learn more: The AMA COVID-19 vaccines guide for physicians offers evidence-based messaging guidance and best practices for consideration in external communications on COVID-19 vaccine topics.

The AMA has developed frequently-asked-questions documents on COVID-19 vaccination covering safety, allocation and distribution, administration and more. There are two FAQs, one designed to answer patients’ questions, and another to address physicians’ COVID-19 vaccine questions.