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DeKalb Strike Team Initiative: An Emergency Preparedness Model for Providing COVID-19 Vaccinations to Vulnerable Communities in DeKalb County, GA

Background: DeKalb County has had over 132,000 confirmed coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) cases and over 1,500 COVID-19 related deaths. In March 2021, DeKalb County Board of Health (DCBOH) partnered with DeKalb County Fire Rescue Department (DCFR) to create a Dekalb Strike Team Initiative (DSTI) to assist with DCBOH's COVID-19 response. DSTI is a proven evidenced-based model that has allowed regions, states, and local communities to scale up and down resources with favorable results in a wide range of disaster situations. The objectives of the DSTI were to reduce and prevent local COVID-19 transmission among high-risk populations and to improve COVID-19 vaccine access to vulnerable community members by vaccinating homebound residents, residents experiencing homelessness, and residents of personal care homes and senior living facilities in DeKalb County, GA.

Methods: The DSTI is comprised of a nurse, clerk, and paramedic personnel. COVID-19 vaccine administration training and just-in-time training were

provided for 31 fire and rescue personnel and 6 nurses who participated in the initiative at the DCFR headquarters.

Results: The DSTI collected quantitative data from March 9, 2021 to April 2022, resulting in a total of 2,697 vaccines being administered to residents. In addition, strike team personnel visited 91 personal care homes and senior living facilities in the county.

Conclusions: The DSTI addressed challenges faced by high-risk, vulnerable community members in accessing COVID-19 vaccine. The DSTI's success at vaccinating over 2,000 residents were a result of our engagement with the community, dedicated efforts to reaching those at highest risk, addressing vaccine hesitancy and misinformation by trusted clinicians, and the collaboration between DCBOH and DCFR staff. Lessons learned will aid in future pandemic preparedness. Other health departments across the country may benefit from a similar initiative to vaccinate vulnerable community members.

Presentation Theme: DeKalb Strike Team Initiative: A model for providing COVID-19 vaccinations to vulnerable communities in DeKalb County, GA.

Collaborators, Advisor(s) and Department(s) that assisted with this research: Collaborators: Thao Le, MPH, Felix S. Lawson MPA, Bernard Hicks, Althea Otuata, DNP, Kimberly Bullock, Darnell D. Fullum, Sandra J. Valenciano, MD, MPH; Organizations: DeKalb County Board of Health, Decatur, GA and DeKalb County Fire Rescue Department, Decatur, GA