

Why GAO Did This Study

COVID-19 continues to have devastating effects on public health, serious economic repercussions, and has disproportionately affected some racial and ethnic groups. Ensuring all racial and ethnic groups have fair access to the COVID-19 vaccine is critical to reducing severe COVID-19 health outcomes and saving lives.

The CARES Act includes a provision for GAO to report on its ongoing oversight efforts related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This report describes, among other things, the actions CDC, HRSA, and FEMA have taken through their programs to provide COVID-19 vaccines to underserved and historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups, and the extent to which these programs vaccinated various racial and ethnic groups.

GAO analyzed CDC, HRSA, and FEMA vaccine administration data through September 2021; interviewed agency officials and reviewed agency documentation on COVID-19 vaccine programs and published literature on vaccine administration; interviewed health officials from four selected states and representatives from six selected stakeholder groups based on several criteria, such as states' racial and ethnic population distributions; and compared the agencies' vaccine administration data to 2020 U.S. Census Bureau population counts.

GAO provided a draft of this report to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), including CDC and HRSA, and FEMA. HHS and FEMA provided technical comments, which GAO incorporated as appropriate.

View [GAO-22-105079](#). For more information, contact Alyssa M. Hundrup at (202) 512-7114 or HundrupA@gao.gov.

COVID-19

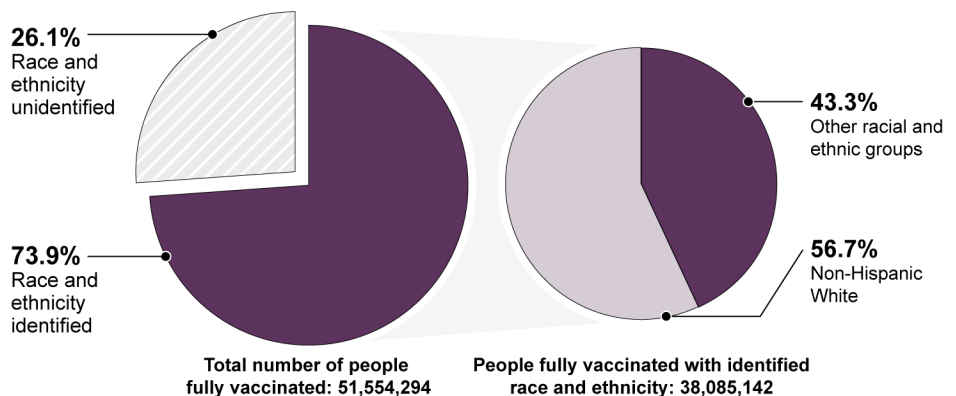
Federal Efforts to Provide Vaccines to Racial and Ethnic Groups

What GAO Found

In February 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) each launched COVID-19 vaccine programs to supplement state and jurisdictional vaccination efforts. Through these three programs, the agencies took steps to provide COVID-19 vaccines to underserved and historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups, such as by using population data on race and ethnicity when selecting vaccination sites.

CDC, HRSA, and FEMA data—although limited in completeness—suggest that the agencies' COVID-19 vaccine programs vaccinated varying shares of racial and ethnic groups. GAO's analysis of data from CDC's retail pharmacy program, the largest of the programs, suggests that, among those with identified race and ethnicity, 43 percent of people vaccinated through the program were from racial and ethnic groups other than non-Hispanic White, as of September 4, 2021. (See figure.)

Percentage of People Vaccinated against COVID-19 through CDC's Retail Pharmacy Program by Race and Ethnicity, as of September 4, 2021



Source: GAO analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data. | [GAO-22-105079](#).

CDC exceeded its goal to administer at least 40 percent—the approximate percent of the U.S. population comprised of racial and ethnic groups other than non-Hispanic White—of COVID-19 vaccines through its retail pharmacy program to persons from these groups. However, comparisons between program vaccination data and U.S. population percentages suggest that some racial and ethnic groups, such as non-Hispanic Black persons, represented a smaller share of persons vaccinated through each of the three federal vaccine programs relative to their population size. For example, non-Hispanic Black persons make up roughly 12 percent of the U.S. population, but account for about 9 percent of persons vaccinated through CDC's retail pharmacy program with identified race and ethnicity, as of September 4, 2021. These findings should be interpreted with caution due to the rate of missing race and ethnicity program data, which may account for some, or even all, of the differences in comparisons.