



MONTGOMERY
TOWNSHIP, NEW JERSEY



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

COVID-19 ANNUAL REPORT

2020 – 2022



Montgomery Township Health Department

Also serving the Boroughs of
Hopewell, Pennington, and Rocky Hill NJ





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INTRODUCTION

This report outlines Montgomery Township Health Department's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and provides insight into how public health prevents, promotes, protects, prepares, and serves our communities.



Montgomery Township Health Department



Vision

Healthy People
in Healthy
Communities



Mission

Our Purpose is the
Good Health of the
People of the
Communities we
Serve.

Together we:

- *Prevent Disease and Injury*
- *Promote Healthier Choices*
- *Protect food, water, and air*
- *Prepare for Emergencies*

We will work together for a
safer and healthier community



Values

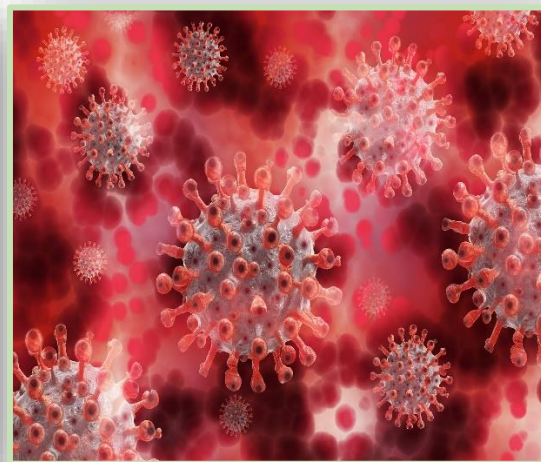
We are committed
To protecting the
Health and Safety
Of those who Live,
Work, and Play in
The Communities
We Serve

PREPARING FOR THE PANDEMIC

In December 2019, rumblings of a new virus began circulating. As it became clear that this virus had “pandemic potential,” Montgomery Township’s Health Officer took rapid steps to prepare Township staff, community leaders, and the broader community.

By late January 2020, the Health Officer had briefed elected officials, Township administration, and stakeholders, which uniquely primed the Township for early and effective COVID-19 response.

The Health Department released the first public COVID-19 statement on their website in February of 2020, and soon after created a dedicated Novel Coronavirus web-page. The Health Department also partnered with the local Office of Emergency Management, and mobilized the Local Emergency Planning Council as well as the Emergency Services Coordinating Committee in order to remain well-equipped and ready to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.



This ahead-of-the-curve, collaborative approach continued throughout the pandemic with:

- frequent crisis communication meetings with key stakeholders,
- ongoing monitoring and communication of new guidance released by the state of New Jersey Dept. of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, other Public Health partners from government, non-profit, academic organizations and
- strategic planning and communication of education, and outreach to community to the public

PREPARING FOR THE PANDEMIC

Capacity Building Prior to and During the Pandemic

Public Health Officials, over many decades, have recognized and improved public health preparedness response tools based on many lessons learned, (ex. Pandemics like the plague, Spanish flu, HIV, SARS, and epidemics like Ebola and Zika) and have accordingly trained and prepared for emergency response to natural, radiological and chemical disasters. Part of developing this emergency response included increasing organizational capacity to respond to public health emergencies by addressing staffing and resource shortages. Montgomery Township Health Department applied for and received state grant funding to increase the Department's staffing capacity prior to the beginning of the pandemic in 2019.



In 2019, Montgomery Township hired a full-time public health nurse. This was a first step in alleviating a critical shortage of public health nursing capacity in the community. In early 2020, a second public health nurse was hired. Having dedicated, in-house public health nurses for Montgomery Township proved especially important during the pandemic, and contributed to a large part of the multi-pronged response mounted by Montgomery Township Health Department in helping keep our community safe.

Public health nurses:



Provide COVID-19 support & guidance to the community



Manage COVID-19 outbreaks



Administer COVID-19 vaccines

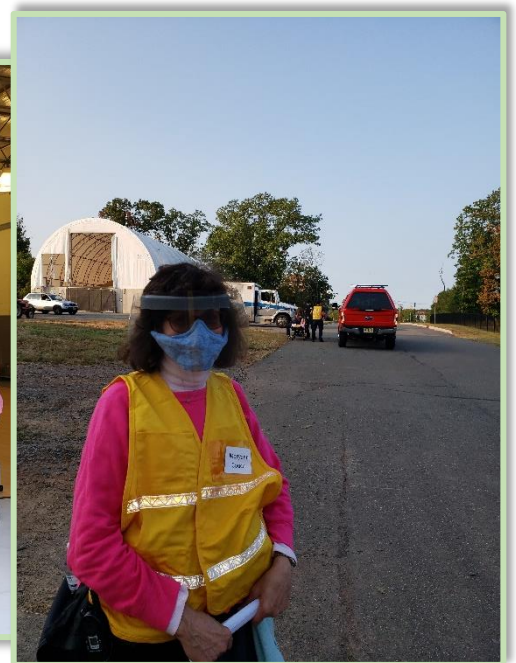
PREPARING FOR THE PANDEMIC

COVID-19 Response Team



To round-out the COVID-19 response team, several case investigators and contact tracers were hired in early 2020. This was thanks in part to the "Strengthening Local Public Health Capacity 2020" NIDOH grant awarded to Montgomery Township Health Department. With the help of our Local Office of Emergency Management, the Health Department compiled a list of people interested in volunteering during the pandemic at varying capacities.

With two full-time public health nurses, several surge nurses, volunteers, the new contact tracers, COVID Generalist, and Vulnerable Populations Outreach Coordinator (VPOC), the Township was able to effectively and efficiently respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Adding these positions doubled the size of the Health Department.



RESPONDING TO THE PANDEMIC

Vaccination Planning



Long before a COVID-19 vaccine was approved, Montgomery Township Health Department explored possible venues for vaccination clinics, and practiced different types of vaccination delivery models. In the fall and winter of 2020, the Health Department hosted several drive-through flu clinics throughout the region, with the intent of using a similar model for COVID-19 vaccine clinics. The Health Department evaluated clinic operations, identified changes and implemented quality improvement measures that were utilized at COVID-19 vaccine clinics to ensure smooth and efficient vaccine clinics.

Achieving Accreditation

After an 8-year effort, Montgomery Township Health Department earned national accreditation through the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) in 2020 with support from Township Administration, Board of Health and Community Stakeholders. Established in 2007, PHAB is a nonprofit organization that administers the national accreditation program which aims to improve and protect the health of the public by advancing and transforming the quality and performance of governmental public health agencies in the US and abroad. MTHD is one of the smallest health departments in the nation, and one of five local New Jersey health departments to achieve this honor.



ADAPTING TO THE PANDEMIC

PAST KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2015-2020



Even in the midst of a pandemic, Montgomery organized and hosted a Strategic Planning Stakeholder event. A strategic plan is like an organization's road map. It typically details where an organization is going, describes how the organization will make decisions to get there, and monitors an organization's progress. At this event, key stakeholders reviewed Montgomery's strategic plan, and provided feedback. COVID-19 precautions were taken, including holding the event in a museum-style setting outside, requiring masks and distancing, and encouraging feedback online instead of in-person.

A Change in Day-to-Day

The pandemic produced a worldwide shift in the way many people work, and Montgomery Township Health Department was no exception. On the whole, the Health Department modified work practices in order to continue serving the public safely. For everyone, this meant meeting less in-person and changing the way key portions of work were carried out. As the pandemic progressed and the public health regulations changes, Montgomery closely followed the latest guidelines to ensure the safety of all staff and community members.



ADAPTING TO THE PANDEMIC

Environmental Health

- During highest spread, no in-person inspections unless complaint reported
- Once inspections resumed, staff wore personal protective equipment (PPE) and streamlined onsite inspections to minimize exposure
- Violations were sent via email instead of in-person

Animal Control

- Saw an increase in wildlife calls and dog bites
- Saw an increase in # of kittens rescued (due to fewer spay & neuter events) and increase in pet adoptions
- Met residents outside of homes, or responded via phone or video chats, when possible
- Wore proper PPE and distanced when in-person



Public Health Nursing

- Conducted annual onsite immunization audits safely with proper PPE and distancing
- On boarded and trained contact tracing team
- Implemented modified safety protocols for all immunization clinics

Vital Statistics

- Held in-person marriage license meetings by appointment only with proper PPE
- Transitioned to online licensing through the new GovPlot system
- Adapted to State of NJ's extended 90-day marriage license validity

Health Education

- Held June 2020 Strategic Planning outside with proper PPE and distancing
- Transitioned programs to virtual and cancelled all in-person programs
- Provided ongoing guidance and resources to regional partners

ADAPTING TO THE PANDEMIC

Case Investigation, Contact Tracing, & Community Education

From COVID-19 case mitigation and management to the beginning of vaccine administration, the Montgomery Township Health Department staff members worked long hours in 2020, 2021, and 2022 to educate the community about the facts of the virus, identify positive cases, contact trace to reduce virus spread, assist organizations in following the New Jersey Department of Health safety guidelines, and begin administering COVID-19 vaccines. This was a period when staff from every division and department of the Township assisted with COVID-19 response activities while striving to maintain the department's essential public health services at the same time.





ADAPTING TO THE PANDEMIC

Outbreak Management

Montgomery Township Health Department oversaw all of Montgomery Township's outbreaks. Public health nurses worked closely with regional NJDOHepidemiologists, Montgomery COVID-19 team and local community stakeholders to investigate and minimize spread of COVID-19.

Regional
NJDOH
Epidemiologists

MTHD
COVID-19
Team

Local
Community
Stakeholders

Your Actions
Matter!

Wash your hands
Physical distance
Stay home if sick
MASK UP!



Prevent. Promote. Protect.

COVID-2019

• Montgomery Township • NJ

Latest Reported Case Numbers

Montgomery Twp.	1,272
Rocky Hill Boro	35
Currently Ill	7
Deaths	25

Presumed Recovered 1,275*

*People who can't get tested are not included

*Presumed recovered" means that cases have met the criteria for discontinuation of isolation. At least 10 days from diagnosis, plus 24 hrs. after symptoms resolve.

Last updated:
5/28/2021
9:00am

Extensive interviews with positive cases helped determine a timeline of close contact for other exposed individuals, and thus, enabled the Health Department to proceed with action that kept the highest number of community members safe. Sometimes this included temporarily closing facilities or postponing events.

Throughout the pandemic, outbreaks typically occurred in pockets of the community which lived, worked, or played in congregate settings. In the beginning of the pandemic, most outbreaks were occurring in healthcare facilities and long term care facilities. With the guidance of Montgomery's public health nurses, these facilities put more infection control measures in place, and decreased the frequency and severity of outbreaks. As people in long-term care facilities started to get vaccinated, outbreaks decreased even further.

OVERCOMING THE PANDEMIC

Communication with the Community

MONTGOMERY BOARD OF HEALTH
Covid-19 Update

By Jeremy S. Grayson, MD

Hello all my fellow Montgomery residents. As July begins, we have begun to slowly embark upon Stage Two of the recovery process from the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic.

We have spent months at home with little to no contact with the world outside our immediate households.

Home schooling, working from home, limited diversions, isolation from loved ones, business closures and skyrocketing unemployment, political upheaval, and protests stemming from yet another racially motivated murder — a further reminder of a United States still unwilling to come to terms with its racist past nor address its original sin in the present.

While some may object to systemic racism's inclusion here, race cannot be ignored, especially

Jeremy S. Grayson, MD
President, Montgomery Board of Health

The past couple of weeks have seen child care centers reopen to nonessential workers; outdoor dining instituted; nonessential retail opened; and an increased size of outdoor gatherings.

The rules, regulations, and policies for all these are available on the covid19.nj.gov website, as is other important information. I suggest everyone take some time to read the information contained therein as it clears up many misconceptions, misunderstandings, and potential ambiguities. Also, understand that all of the project-

and as a community is tantamount; similar arguments were once made about seat-belts and car seats.

One can never be too safe when there is a threat of a highly contagious and novel respiratory pathogen; especially one that is still far from being understood by the scientific and medical community, with the exception that it is highly transmissible from the air an infected patient exhales.

Since the asymptomatic carrier state, and transmission has been clearly delineated, and since there is wide variability in duration of viral shedding by the infected, masks are mandatory for restrictions to continue to be rolled back.

Now that testing is readily available, should you or a household member feel the slightest bit ill, go get tested. While there is still a 30 percent false negative rate, it is the best we have. Additionally, in this situation, self-quarantine so others might not unknowingly get infected.

Continue to social distance. Yes, our social circles are widening; I witness it every day in my

MONTGOMERY SCHOOLS' PHYSICIAN
Doctor Mandelbaum

School's Out: What Can Students Do Safely?

By Bert Mandelbaum, MD

Most families are grappling with some commonly asked questions. Is it safe to go to camps or to the pool? Can my children see their friends or grandparents? If so, how can we do it safely?

Surveillance data throughout our state is showing a decline in new Covid-19 cases. The big question is how to continue that trend while resuming activities that are important to us.

It is important to remember that people can be contagious even before they are displaying symptoms of Covid-19.

disease can help us understand why social distancing and masking tends to be so effective in decreasing the spread of Covid-19. By increasing the space between people, it makes it that much harder for droplets from one person to infect another. Masks are probably one of the best methods to prevent the spread of Covid-19 because they both work as a barrier to decrease the spread of droplets but also function as a

In several issues of the Montgomery News, Health Officer Stephanie Carey, Board of Health President Dr. Jeremy Grayson, and Board of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Bert Mandelbaum endorsed vaccination, prompted residents to seek help, and supplied information about ways to receive help.

The Health Department has continuously served as a resource for the community by keeping residents in-the-loop about COVID-19. Early on, the Health Department provided COVID-19 updates through the Monty Town YouTube channel, Health Department website, Montgomery News, and other media formats. Former Montgomery Mayor Jaffer conducted interviews with key community leaders, while the Montgomery Township Health Department and Montgomery Board of Health joined forces to share current briefings and accurate recommendations during monthly Zoom Board of Health meetings. Together, they developed videos in multiple languages that targeted residents who were vaccine-hesitant.



GOVERNMENT
Departments & Services

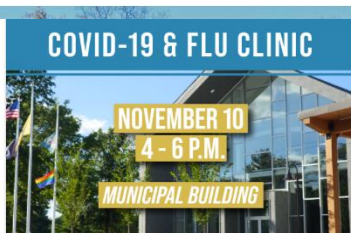
BUSINESS
Directory & Development

COMMUNITY
Residents & Visitors

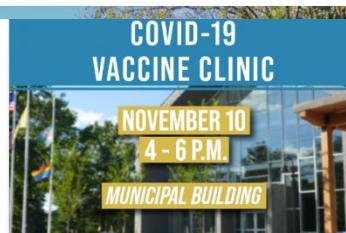
HOW DO I?
Resources & FAQs



Covid Vax Booster Clinic
Nov. 18
Author: Health Department
Posted on: 11-08-2022



Covid Vax Booster & Flu
Clinic Nov. 10
Author: Health Department
Posted on: 11-04-2022



Covid-19 Vax Clinics Nov. 10
Author: Health Department
Posted on: 10-31-2022

Thanks in part to the Website Committee, the township created a new website and regularly updated its content to keep the community informed with the latest COVID-19 information including any upcoming vaccine clinics and resources for testing.

OVERCOMING THE PANDEMIC

Continued Communication with the Community

The Health Department performed virtual and “boots-on-the-ground” outreach to local businesses, restaurants, daycares, youth camps, faith-based organizations, schools, health care facilities, and other stakeholders. Staff simplified executive orders and NJDOH guidance, and answered community questions. In-person outreach included tabling events and presentations at schools, community developments, colleges and several other sites. These sessions included education about the COVID-19 vaccine, as well as information about local social supports. Sign placement in high-traffic areas with key vaccination messaging allowed for crucial clinic advertising. To highlight COVID-19 vaccination in town and to impart vaccine education, the Health Department designed flyers explaining how best to protect yourself and others. To support businesses, a “COVID-19 Business Packet” was developed that included signage and guidance for employers responding to COVID-19.



Supporting Those At-Risk in Our Community

The Health Department applied for and was awarded a NJDOH grant in 2021 which established the position of Vulnerable Populations Outreach Coordinator and COVID Generalist. The VPOC's community assessment found that many residents were struggling with food insecurity and food access, especially seniors, people with disabilities, and income-qualified families. Montgomery Twp. applied for and was awarded a secondary grant to address these needs. The Montgomery Township Food Pantry, allied with the Princeton Elks Lodge, worked to alleviate food insecurity throughout the region. The COVID Generalist worked closely with the Public Health Nurses to assist in all matters related to COVID-19.

The VPOC ensured access to supports like:



*Housing and food resources
Unemployment compensation
Social supports resource linkages*

The Generalist assisted with:



*COVID-19 resource linkages
Laboratory reporting issues
Vaccine Clinic Support
Data Reporting*

OVERCOMING THE PANDEMIC

Vaccination by the Numbers

195

Clinics in Montgomery from February 2021 through December 2022

133

Homebound individuals & family members vaccinated

7,147

Total vaccines administered to date

COVID-19 Vaccination Efforts

As early as November 2020, Montgomery Township Health Department aided in the COVID-19 vaccination effort. In partnership with Mercer County, Montgomery sent support staff to clinics all over Mercer County. In total, Health Department staff served at over twenty-five of these partner clinics that resulted in over 20,000 vaccinations. This in the field training enabled staff to take notes and bring back lessons learned when beginning Montgomery vaccine clinics in early 2021.

Montgomery Township Health Department concentrated efforts to help the most vulnerable in the community find vaccination appointments. At first, the Health Dept. targeted health care providers and seniors, especially those age 65+ who did not have access to internet or to transportation. Then, the Health Department broadened its reach to include local food handlers, local landscapers, construction workers and people with disabilities and language barriers.

In February 2021, Montgomery and Hopewell Township Health Departments united to organize vaccination clinics at the Hopewell Elementary School. The Health Officer and Township officials strongly advocated for a closer satellite site for its Somerset residents, and through their urging, were awarded a Montgomery-specific vaccine allocation. This allowed clinics to happen closer-to-home. With this reliable vaccine supply, Health Department public health nurses were also able to travel to local homebound residents throughout late March and early April.

As the latest COVID-19 vaccines became available in late 2021 and throughout 2022, Montgomery Township Health Department continued to offer vaccines to the community, including pediatric, PeeWee, and booster doses.



OVERCOMING THE PANDEMIC

Continued Vaccination Efforts

Montgomery and Hillsborough Health Departments collaborated to operate joint clinics at each of their respective senior centers, alternating weekends in March and beyond. Next, Montgomery began offering COVID-19 vaccines at strategic pop-up locations throughout Skillman, Belle Mead, and Rocky Hill. Some of these locations included Montgomery Hills, ShopRite, Otto Kaufman Community Center, Montgomery Farmer's Market, Evangelical Free Church, Pike Run, and the Princeton Elks Lodge, Schools, etc. At clinics, services were often available in both English and Spanish.



The Health Department incentivized vaccination for its employees by offering a half-day off from work to any Township employee that could prove they had been vaccinated. Vaccination was offered to interested employees on-site at the municipal building and provided Township employees, including first responders with latest guidance on appropriate isolation and quarantine measures to prevent outbreaks and keep the community operating without interruptions in critical services to residents.

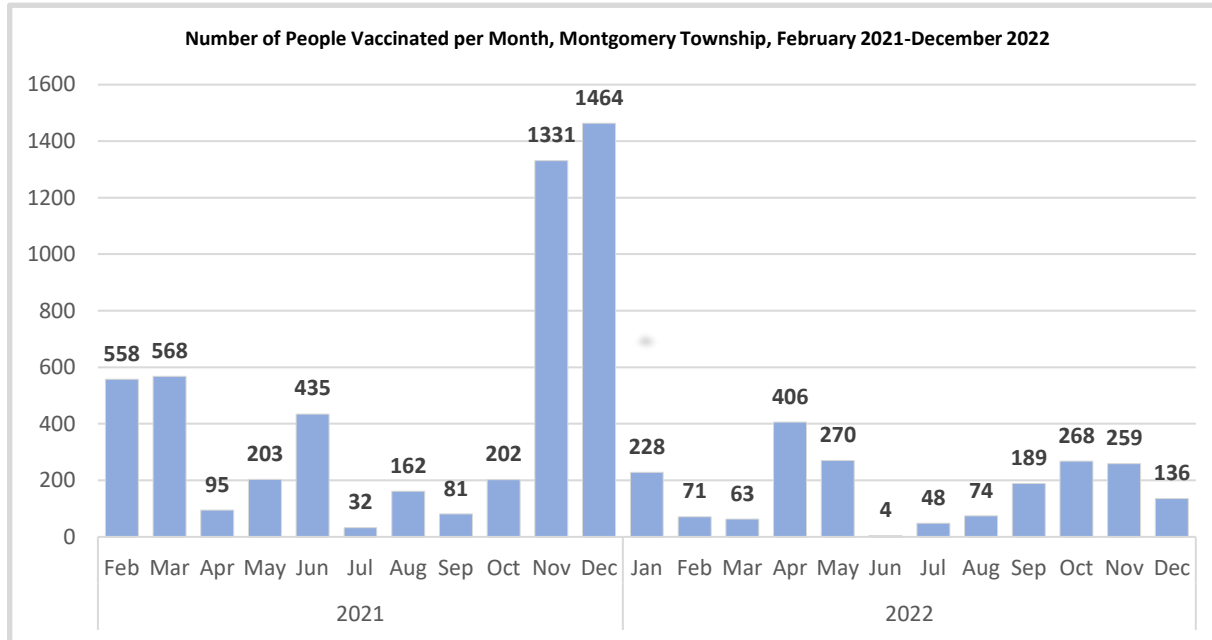


Due to storage and refrigeration constraints, the Health Department was only able to stock the Janssen Johnson & Johnson vaccine, or the Moderna vaccine in early 2021. As a result, most people vaccinated were usually 18 years of age or older. However, in June 2021, the Health Department began receiving Pfizer doses from Penn Medicine Princeton Medical Center, and started offering Pfizer vaccines for people 12 years and older at Montgomery High School. As vaccines became available for individuals younger than 12, MTHD continued to offer the latest vaccines, that included all brands.



OVERCOMING THE PANDEMIC

Vaccination Achievements

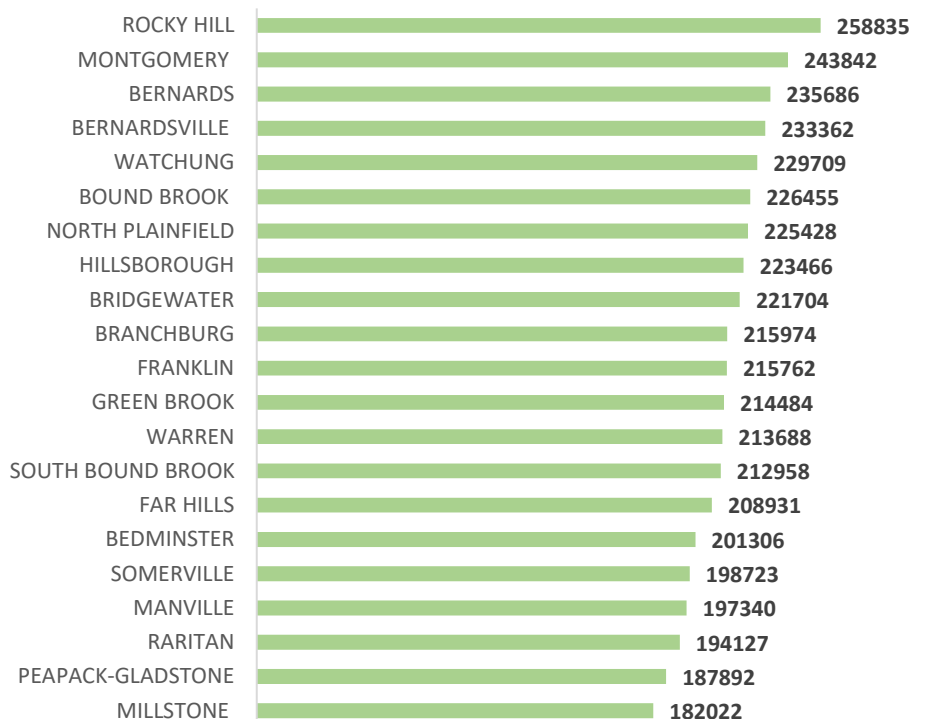


Peak vaccination occurred in November and December 2021, due to the approval of the 1st booster and pediatric vaccine. Montgomery continues to provide vaccination clinics monthly, and adjusts based on the demand.

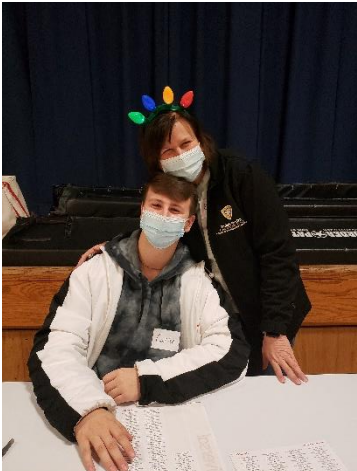
As of December 2022, Montgomery Township and Rocky Hill were the two municipalities in Somerset County with the highest number of doses administered per 100, 000 adults. This would not have been possible without the Surge Vaccinator Team



Doses Administered per 100K Adults









Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the Township Committee, Board of Health, Surge Vaccinators, High School Student Volunteers, and all of Montgomery Twp.'s Municipal Departments and Employees who provided their support and help during these historic times!



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