

# State offered leftover vaccines to civilians at a clinic for first responders, prompting questions

By **Matt Stout** Globe Staff, Updated March 2, 2021, 7:25 p.m.



Nearly 300 civilians were invited on three separate days in January and February to receive a shot at the Massachusetts State Police headquarters in Framingham. JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF FILE

As vaccine-seekers across Massachusetts were encouraged to [hunt for appointments online](#), officials in the Baker administration offered hundreds of residents shots at a COVID-19 vaccination site that was reserved for state first responders and not open to the wider public.

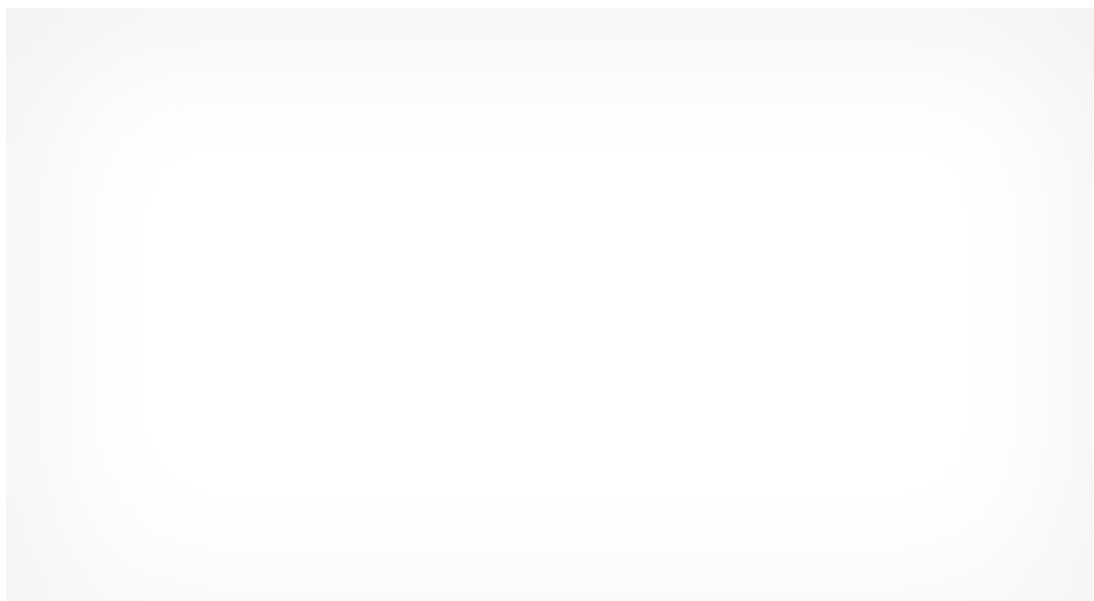
State officials invited nearly 300 civilians on three separate days in January and February to receive a shot at the Massachusetts State Police headquarters in Framingham, where officials said they had extra doses at a clinic and, in at least one instance, faced “limited time” to find arms to put them in before they would be wasted.

Each of the individuals vaccinated — 292 in all — were either over the age of 75 or personal care attendants, all of whom [were eligible to receive a vaccine](#), according to a spokesman for Governor Charlie Baker’s public safety office. Administration officials said Tuesday that they could not identify any of the civilians, citing legal restrictions on releasing people’s medical information.

They instead sketched a broad accounting of how they identified those offered a coveted shot. Officials at the Executive Office Of Public Safety and Security contacted people “known to them,” a spokesman said, including residents who had contacted the administration’s constituent services office in late January seeking help because they were unable to book an appointment through the state’s [balky website](#), state officials said. At the time, the state had not yet set up a dedicated [call center](#).

State officials did not describe how they selected certain personal care attendants to receive a vaccine.

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The circumstances — which state officials had not previously made public but described in response to Globe questions this week — underscore the disjointed nature of the state’s vaccine rollout.

Baker [has changed](#) course [several times](#) around how shots are distributed and to whom, while [dramatically ramping up](#) the number of doses being administered, which topped 1.8 million Tuesday. He’s also repeatedly said only those with appointments should be vaccinated, saying facilities shouldn’t do a “cattle call” for unused doses.

The decision to offer the unidentified civilians shots also stoked existing concerns about how equitable the administration of doses was as some people — by virtue of their availability or having placed a phone call to the administration seeking help — were given access to a law enforcement vaccination site where members of the general public could not independently book a slot.

Neither the State Police headquarters nor two other State Police facilities used to administer vaccines are listed by the state among its [publicly available sites](#).

A spokeswoman for Baker said none of those vaccinated were invited by the governor or Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito. A spokesman for [Thomas A Turco III](#), Baker’s public safety secretary, said he also did not invite or otherwise contact potential recipients.

Baker has [asked the public for patience](#) in finding appointments as demand for the vaccines overwhelmingly outstripped the state’s rolling federal supply. That the administration’s own site at the State Police headquarters was, like other facilities, scrambling to find arms for unused shots also ran counter to Baker’s own public messaging at the time.

When people [flocked to a mass vaccination site](#) last month after reports circulated of “extra” doses, Baker said pointedly that vaccination sites were expected “to manage their

dosing and manage their vaccines” and that residents should expect to receive a vaccine only if they have a scheduled appointment.

”We don’t believe that there should be, sort of, a cattle call at the end of the day,” he said of offering unused doses [at a Feb. 11 news conference](#). “If you don’t have an appointment, you’re not going to get a vaccine. Because that’s the way the process is set up, and that’s the way it’s going to work.”

Samuel Scarpino, a Northeastern University epidemiologist, said it’s reasonable that the administration would try to ensure no shots are wasted. But how the administration approached it shows a lack of planning and could exacerbate the inequities in who is able to be vaccinated, he said.

“The governor has had some pretty pointed rhetoric about pulling vaccines away from some local health agencies. This certainly does feel like a double standard,” Scarpino said. “I think we can hold him to a higher standard — not based on the actions he took, which I think were sensible given the position we’re in — but the fact that we’re in that position is a failure in leadership and planning.”

State officials said they offered vaccines at the State Police vaccination site to certain residents three times: on Jan. 29, Feb. 10, and Feb. 12.

In the first instance, officials within the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security, which oversees the State Police, described a clamber to make sure doses didn’t go to waste after state law enforcement personnel did not show up for appointments.

That included contacting the administration’s constituent services offices “for contact information from eligible residents who had inquired about getting a vaccine because they were unable to book an appointment online using a computer,” an agency spokesman said. “With only hours left, EOPSS contacted individuals that were 75 and older and known to EOPSS staff.”

On the two days in February, EOPSS staff expected to have extra doses at a State Police

site and consulted officials overseeing the state's COVID-19 response before offering

them to the personal care attendants. A representative at the union representing those workers did not return a call seeking comment Tuesday.

In all, state officials said about 175 personal care attendants and 117 seniors over the age of 75 ultimately received a vaccine over the three days.

In each case, people were contacted who "could get to the vaccine clinic on very short notice," said Jake Wark, a spokesman for the Executive Office of Public Safety, noting that the clinic at the State Police headquarters was set up "for limited periods of time."

The 117 seniors returned to the Framingham facility on Friday to receive their second dose. Department officials circulated an e-mail to State Police staff last week saying that of the 320 people scheduled to receive vaccinations that day, roughly 100 were "senior citizens who were invited by EOPSS & the Governor's office," according to a copy of the message obtained by the Globe.

Those who were vaccinated Friday did not sign into the public visitor's log at the department's headquarters. When a Globe reporter visited the Framingham facility to view the log Monday, the administrative staff asked that he sign in, citing the department's policy.

*Matt Rocheleau of the Globe staff contributed to this report.*

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