

Tony Evers offers \$100 gift cards for first shot of COVID-19 vaccine

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WISCONSIN OSHKOSH - Gov.

Tony Evers is turning to cash incentives to persuade more Wisconsin residents to get vaccinated against COVID-19 as a more contagious variant of the virus threatens the state.

Evers announced a new program Monday that would distribute through Labor Day \$100 Visa gift cards to anyone in the state who gets their first shot of a vaccine from a Wisconsin provider between Aug. 20 and Sept. 6.

The governor told reporters at a news conference at Winnebago Health Department in Oshkosh that he had been skeptical of creating an incentive program but changed his mind after seeing results of a new program in Michigan that provides cash prizes ranging from \$50,000 to \$2 million.

'I'll be quite frank with you, I was one of the skeptics of the discussion, but I saw how well this particular program worked in the state of Michigan,' he said. 'Time for me to move beyond that and do the incentive. It is really important for us to make sure this school year gets off to a good start, and this is one of the ways to do that is to make that happen.'

The effort is being funded by federal American Rescue Plan Act dollars and aimed at boosting vaccination rates as children prepare to return to classrooms, where they will interact with each other at rates not seen since before the pandemic began spreading in Wisconsin more than a year ago.

The new program was announced the same day the Food and Drug Administration

granted full approval for the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine — providing an answer to some who have avoided getting vaccinated because the vaccines available were under an emergency-use authorization.

The new approval also may mean more employers mandate Pfizer vaccinations.

Wisconsin's vaccination rate has hovered around 50% for weeks.

Data released last week showed vaccines dramatically lowered the threat of infection, hospitalization and death for Wisconsinites when confronted with the COVID-19 virus, but it also revealed infections were climbing among the fully vaccinated due to the delta variant.

'While 50% is leaps and bounds from when we started, it's not where we should be,' Evers said. 'I'm calling on all eligible Wisconsinites who have not gotten their COVID vaccine yet to step up, roll up your sleeves and help Wisconsin put an end to COVID-19 for once and all.'

The gift cards will be mailed to applicants and may take up to six weeks to be distributed. To receive the card, eligible Wisconsin residents should fill out a form available at

100.wisconsin.gov, which will be used to verify the vaccine was administered.

The incentive program follows one deployed during the Wisconsin State Fair, which

that selected winners to receive \$1 million cash prizes and \$150,000 student scholarships.

Shannon Holsey, president of the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican community, said her tribe has been paying members and employees \$250 to get vaccinated — a program that she said has helped bring the community's vaccination rate up to '70% and climbing.'

The tribe has been paying incentives for about three months and the program ends Aug. 31, Holsey said. The tribe's incentive has been part of an aggressive vaccination program that includes placing ads promoting the vaccine on billboards.

'We are no longer in a fight against COVID-19, this is now a fight between delta variant and all variants that could follow,' Evers said.

provided free cream puffs to anyone who got vaccinated at a pop-up clinic at the fairgrounds. About 600 people took advantage.

Some other states have offered much richer incentives to boost vaccination rates there. In Illinois, for example, Gov. J.B. Pritzker created a lottery program

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