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**Nicholas LaMonte, 17, of Amherst, gets his hepatitis A booster from Rosemary Kwas.**

John Hickey/Buffalo News

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## FOCUS: DRIVE-THROUGH HEALTH CARE

# Drive-through vaccination effort a success in Amherst

*1,385 people receive hepatitis A booster*

By Sandra Tan NEWS STAFF REPORTER

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Perhaps it should be renamed the Fast-food Response Design — or FReD.

That seems appropriate for a mass-vaccination event that makes use of a key fast-food feature — drive-through lanes.

A total of 1,385 people received the hepatitis A vaccine in Amherst on Sept. 13, and most never got out of their cars. Instead, they were funneled through an Amherst town highway garage and received a hepatitis booster shot by sticking their arms out of car windows.

The event provided a public service. But its main purpose was to see if a drive-through emergency response

program using real patients and real vaccine could succeed on a large scale.

**Bottom line: It can. In fact, while the event had some glitches, it was successful enough to gain praise from affiliates with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the University at Albany School of Public Health.**

**“They’re going to be sharing this with health departments across the country,” said Dan Neaverth Jr., deputy commissioner of Erie County emergency medical services.**

**Eva K. Lee, director of the Center for Operations Research in Medicine and Healthcare at Georgia Institute of Technology, said Amherst’s vaccination exercise was the first drivethrough event that administered a real vaccine to so many people.**

**Lee sent Georgia Tech students to time the vaccination of patients at the Amherst garage and served as lead investigator in the study, which was sponsored by the CDC. The results of the drive-through event will be part of a report shared with the Institute of Medicine and the Homeland Security Council in Washington, D. C.**

**“I think the exercise was really well organized,” said Lee, whose center has studied 20 different emergency “dispensing sites” around the country, which have inoculated against everything from smallpox to anthrax. “The whole logistics part is really quite impressive.”**

**The fact that organizers held a dry run the day before with a limited number of patients helped to improve the weekend event immensely, she said. So did the fact that the garage was separated into “fast lanes” for cars with fewer people and a “slow lane” for larger groups, especially those with small children, organizers said.**

**James Zymanek, Amherst’s director of emergency services, said that of the 1,385 people who received vaccines, 368 were children.**

**The Erie County Department of Health provided a free round of secondary hepatitis A booster shots for those who got their initial vaccination in February. That followed a hepatitis scare after a Wegmans employee was diagnosed with the disease.**

**But unlike February, when the Health Department set up a stationary clinic that forced people to wait for hours in frigid temperatures, the drivethrough was considered a much more positive experience by participants.**

**“The first time it was a nightmare,” said Susan La Monte, who drove her two teenage sons, Nicholas and John, to get the booster vaccination . “We waited there for four hours, and my son was in surgery the day before, so he had to stand there on crutches.”**

**This time around, nobody stood, and the wait was minimal, she said, guessing that it took her about 20 minutes to get through the town garage.**

**“I didn’t feel uncomfortable one bit,” La Monte said. “I was impressed.”**

**CDC officials complimented the coordinated manner in which so many local and state agencies worked together to provide the vaccination service.**

**Mark Waldenmaier, training program coordinator for the University at Albany School of Public Health, conducted exit interviews with roughly 900 participants. Overall, he said, the feedback was positive.**

**Many described the process as quick, efficient and convenient, he said. They seemed to like the fact that people could stay in their own environment, listen to music, adjust their own climate-control settings and stay insulated from other participants who might be sick.**

**That’s not to say the program couldn’t be improved. Neaverth said that while the planning was great, organizers wished more people had participated to really test the drivethrough’s capacity.**

**The paperwork also seemed to be confusing to some, said town and county officials.**

**Finally, Lee pointed out that the stations that people had to drive through to get processed — from filling out the paperwork beforehand to parking in a holding lot afterward to make sure patients had no adverse reactions — were too stretched out.**

**People had to drive several miles to get through the whole exercise, she said. That could pose serious**

**problems with traffic control in a catastrophic emergency. Even so, she rated the Amherst program in the top half of all dispensing sites her center has studied.**

**“In general,” she said, “it’s a really good design.”**

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