



January 5, 2021

Interim COVID-19 Guidance: Week 4 COVID-19 Vaccine Prioritization in OPWDD Certified Settings

Background

On December 11, 2020 the Governor and the NYS Department of Health (DOH) announced that the COVID-19 vaccine would be available to individuals and staff living and working in residential facilities certified by the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) as part of the initial phase of the COVID-19 vaccination program in New York, beginning the week of December 21, 2020. Consistent with priorities set by the federal Center for Disease Control, staff working with individuals with developmental disabilities in other outpatient settings have also been prioritized to receive doses of the COVID-19 vaccine in week four of distribution in New York State. Limited amounts of the COVID-19 vaccines are available and the number of doses received at this time do not cover all persons living or working in OPWDD certified settings.

Week 4 Distribution

On January 5, 2021, the New York State Department of Health (NYDOH) issued guidance for programs certified by OPWDD, the Office for Mental Health, and the Office of Addiction Services and Support regarding the [Prioritization of Essential Healthcare and Direct Support Personnel as well as High Risk Populations for COVID-19 Vaccination](#) to help guide week four of vaccine distribution.

OPWDD certified residential and outpatient providers should immediately begin implementing the NYDOH January 5, 2021 guidance in order to create a prioritization of highest risk facilities for the administration of the vaccine during this next week(s) of limited distribution.

Prioritization for Certified Residential Facilities

Vaccination prioritization for individuals and staff living and working OPWDD certified residential facilities shall continue in compliance with the NYSDOH guidance issued on December 21, 2020. That prioritization remains ongoing and individuals and staff of those facilities should already be working with their local designated vaccination distribution sites to schedule first and second vaccination appointments. Per the January 5, 2021 guidance, permission is no longer required by the state for a facility to progress within its internal prioritization so long as it is done consistently with Phase 1a guidance.

Prioritization of Staff in Non-Residential Certified Facilities or Services and Article 16 Clinics

The NYDOH week 4 guidance, issued January 5, 2021, expands vaccination prioritization for staff who have direct contact with OPWDD service recipients in “outpatient” settings. At this time, only staff (and not individuals served) are included in this next stage of prioritization.

Therefore, beginning January 5, 2021, staff who have routine direct contact with service recipients as part of their work in certified site-based or non-site-based day services (e.g. day habilitation, community habilitation, respite, and employment services), self-direction, or in an Article 16 clinic, are eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine as part of the current phase of vaccinations.

This includes the following staff: clinical or direct support staff, quality assurance or investigatory staff, and/or administrative staff of those programs who have routine direct contact with or exposure to service recipients. It also includes staff of registered providers or other contract staff for any of the services described above (e.g. substitute direct care staff, contracted clinical staff, or janitorial staff at day programs). Employers operating any such programs should immediately review and implement the prioritization protocol described in the January 5, 2021 NYSDOH guidance https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2021/01/week4guidance_opwdd_omh_oasas.pdf.

Week four prioritization does not include transportation staff, care managers, or any employee whose job duties are purely administrative. All staff and individuals will be eligible to receive vaccinations throughout the coming weeks as the state receives additional doses.

Additional Information

For questions, please contact the New York State Department of Health, Bureau of Immunization at COVID19vaccine@health.ny.gov.

For OPWDD-specific technical assistance, please contact Susan Prendergast at Susan.b.prendergast@opwdd.ny.gov.