



A Message from Commissioner Kastner

UPDATE RE: COVID-19 Vaccine for People With Developmental Disabilities Living at Home

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

I am pleased to share that the most recent expansion of prioritization in the New York State vaccination rollout now includes all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. As you know, people living in OPWDD certified residential settings, as well as staff providing support to people in all settings, were previously prioritized for the COVID-19 vaccine. On February 5, 2021, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo announced that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities living in non-certified settings will be added to the 1b prioritization category and will be eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccines as of February 15, 2021.

Access to the vaccine has been a challenge across the country and we will continue to work diligently to ensure that all people supported by OPWDD have had the opportunity to be vaccinated. Information about NY's vaccination rollout, including eligibility and prioritization can be found here: <https://covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/>. Additional guidance related to the announcement about newly eligible populations will also be posted in the coming days.

I would like to emphasize that, while it is up to each person to choose to receive the vaccine, the more people who receive the COVID-19 vaccine, the better the public health outcome will be. Answers to some frequently asked questions about the safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccine are available at the Department of Health website as well as information about the benefits of the vaccine, and the federal approval process.

As valued members of our OPWDD community, I appeal to every one of you to help educate others about the importance of this vaccine and to do your part to encourage widespread vaccination. And please remember that the threat of COVID-19 is far from over. Even after you receive the vaccine, please continue to follow guidance on social distancing, avoid crowds, wear a mask in public and wash your hands frequently.

Working together, we can defeat COVID-19.

Please stay safe,

Theodore Kastner, M.D., M.S.
Commissioner