

Leading Mental Health Organizations Call on States to Prioritize Individuals in Psychiatric Hospitals for Vaccination

On December 3, 2020, the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices issued recommendations for allocating initial supplies of COVID-19 vaccine. It recommended that the first groups to receive vaccines be health care workers, including hospital staff, and residents of “long-term care facilities” including nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices’ Interim Recommendation for Allocating Initial Supplies of COVID-19 Vaccine — United States, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/pdfs/mm6949e1-H.pdf>.

The Committee’s recommendations do not directly address whether psychiatric inpatients are or should be included among those first to receive the vaccine (Phase 1A). However, the Committee did make clear that “Health care settings in general [such as hospitals], and long-term care settings in particular, can be high-risk locations for SARS-CoV-2 exposure and transmission.” *Id.*

Many psychiatric inpatients, including most psychiatric inpatients in general hospitals, will be discharged after a relatively short stay. In the allocation of vaccines, inpatient psychiatric patients who are likely to be discharged after a short stay should receive the same priority for vaccination as other hospital patients.

Many psychiatric inpatients, however, especially those in state and other public hospitals, will experience stays of weeks and months. In the allocation of vaccines, these patients should have the same priority for vaccination as residents of other longer-term congregate care facilities, such as nursing homes and assisted living facilities.¹

Hospital discharge plans should identify how a second dose of the vaccine will be administered if the second dose has not been received by the time of discharge.

Accordingly, to implement the CDC’s recommendations, state authorities making vaccine allocation decisions should:

¹ Information presented to the Committee defined LTCF’s [Long Term Care Facilities] as “Nursing home/skilled nursing facility, rehabilitation facility, assisted living/residential care, LTACH, group home/retirement, psychiatric facility, or other long-term care facility.” <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/acip/meetings/downloads/slides-2020-11/COVID-04-Dooling.pdf>.

1. Include psychiatric inpatients whose hospital stay is likely to be weeks or months in the first group to receive the vaccine (phase 1a).
2. Give short-term psychiatric inpatients the same priority as other hospital inpatients.
3. Require that hospital discharge plans provide for the administration of a second dose of the vaccine.

We also urge state authorities to follow guidance from SAMSHA concerning limiting psychiatric inpatient stays during the pandemic.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/considerations-care-treatment-mental-substance-use-disorders-covid19.pdf>

National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors

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