



Important Information about the COVID-19 Vaccine for People with Developmental Disabilities

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

As you are likely aware, the first doses of the long-awaited vaccine against COVID-19 have made their way to New York State. On December 14, Sandra Lindsay, an ICU nurse from Queens, made history as the first person in the United States to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. All of us at OPWDD are grateful that a vaccine that can help protect the people we support, and our staff who care for them, is now in sight.

Governor Cuomo has announced a phased-in approach to vaccine distribution and people with developmental disabilities living in congregate settings, and the staff who care for them, will be among the first to receive the vaccine in Phase 1 of the distribution. You can find more information about the phased-in approach to vaccine distribution here: <https://forward.ny.gov/covid-19-vaccine-distribution>

At this time, I'd like to alert you to some materials we have made available to help you understand the vaccine distribution process and what it means for you. These include a [video explaining the vaccine](#) and a [plain language document](#). All the materials about the COVID-19 vaccine will be found on the [OPWDD COVID-19 webpage](#), including a copy of [the NYS Department of Health Screening and Consent Form for COVID-19](#). As new guidance becomes available related to the vaccination process, it will also be posted on that page.

While plans for distributing the vaccine are underway and are moving quickly, a lot needs to happen to ensure success. First, I would like to emphasize that the more people who are offered the vaccine and choose to take it, the better the public health outcome will be. As valued members of our OPWDD community, I appeal to each and every one of you to help educate others about the importance of vaccination and do your part to encourage widespread vaccination. Each person eligible for vaccination will need to consent to being vaccinated. OPWDD will soon be issuing guidance on the consent process and will be sharing it via our email delivery system and on our website.

While the vaccine's arrival in New York is welcome news, please remember that the threat of COVID-19 is far from over. The vaccine may not prevent people from catching COVID-19 and does not protect against any other viruses, but people who are vaccinated are much less likely to become sick after the vaccine. And if they do catch COVID-19 after vaccination, they are much less likely to feel sick or die as a result of this virus.

As the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have warned repeatedly, COVID-19 can spread anywhere, even places where you feel safe, like your home. Please continue to follow public health guidance by staying at least 6 feet away from other people, washing your hands frequently, wearing a mask when you are in the presence of other people and avoiding crowds both small and large. If we take every precaution available to us, we will have the best chance of staying safe from this extremely contagious virus.

Please be certain that you are signed up for OPWDD updates. It is the quickest and best way to stay up to date about COVID-19 and all OPWDD news. [Sign up here](#).

Please stay safe,

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