



Maine State Legislature
2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002

January 25, 2021

Janet Mills
Governor

Dr. Nirav Shah, M.D., J.D.
Director, Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention:

Dear Governor Mills and Director Shah:

The States of California and Illinois have recently clarified that family members providing direct support to certain people (including but not limited to people with cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, epilepsy and specialized health care needs including dependence on ventilators, oxygen and other technology) are “health care workers” pursuant to their respective state vaccination plans and thus are prioritized for the COVID-19 vaccination within Phase 1a¹.

Risk of deleterious outcome is elevated in a number of people with some of the above conditions. For example, people with Down syndrome hospitalized with COVID-19 have been reported to have more severe disease, with increased incidence of sepsis and mechanical ventilation², and in a study of 8.26 million people, 4,053 of whom had Down syndrome, it has been estimated that there is a fourfold increased risk for hospitalization and a tenfold increased risk for death among people with Down syndrome.³ Many people at increased risk live with their families or in other non-institutional settings.

In addition, there have been 290 COVID-19 cases so far among adult Mainers with disabilities receiving waiver services for autism, intellectual disability, brain injury, or other related conditions—roughly 5% of the people receiving such services, or nearly double the rate of cumulative COVID-19 cases among the general population in Maine as of 01/20/2021.⁴ While many people in this population live in group homes or other congregate settings, others live in more inclusive settings, including with their family.

Vaccination for people with some of the above conditions may be contraindicated or otherwise unavailable. In particular, children younger than the age covered by emergency use authorization may be at substantially increased risk of deleterious COVID-19 outcomes but may not be able to get the vaccine. For such children, it seems imperative to create a cocoon of protection around them by classifying their

¹ Bargmann N (2021, January 13). Letter from California Department of Developmental Services Clarifying COVID-19 vaccination eligibility for Phase 1A for Family Members. Accessed 01/21/2021 from https://www.dds.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/COVID-19VaccinePhase1ALetter_FamilyMembers_01132021.pdf ; Rahnee P, Stark A (2020, January 21). Letter from Illinois Department of Human Services Clarifying COVID-19 vaccination eligibility for Phase 1A for people providing "Home Health" or serving as "Home Aide/Caregiver" for relative with a disability. Distributed 01/22/2021 via ICDDInfo@illinois.gov listserv and also accessed 01/24/2021 from https://www.thearcofil.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Caregiver-IDHS_Letter_January-21.pdf

² Malle L, Gao C, Hur C, Truong HQ, Bouvier NM, Percha B, Kong X-F, Bogunovic D (2020). Individuals with Down syndrome hospitalized with COVID-19 have more severe disease. *Genetics in Medicine*. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41436-020-01004-w>

³ Kiernan A, Coupland CAC, Keogh RH, Hemingway H, Hippisley-Cox J (2020). COVID-19 mortality risk in Down syndrome: Results from a cohort study of 8 million adults. *Annals of Internal Medicine*. <https://doi.org/10.7326/M20-4986>

⁴ Cumulative COVID-19 Cases by County. Accessed 01/21/2021 from <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/airborne/coronavirus/data.shtml>

caregivers, including their family members, as eligible for vaccination within Phase 1a. This is an issue of health equity.

We urge the executive to follow precedent and protect Mainers at increased risk of deleterious COVID-19 outcomes—especially children at increased risk who are not themselves eligible to receive a vaccine—by classifying family members living with children or adults with the above conditions or other conditions that put them at elevated risk as eligible for vaccination within Phase 1a. This would likely include family members of people in hospice who are able to have face-to-face contact.

Respectfully,

Representative Laurie Osher, PhD

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Representative Kyle Bailey

Representative Ann Matlack

Representative Jeffrey Evangelos

Representative Denise Tepler

Representative Maureen Terry

Senator Matthea Daughtry

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