HHS Town Hall for Providers 2.17.21

**Human Services Workers Q&A *rec.by HHS***

**Q: ­ Assistance to individuals who are high need behaviorally and refuse to go to a community vaccination site? Can it be done at home? Can DayHab staff bill for time assisting families with the process?­**

The COVID-19 Command Center is developing a program to vaccinate individuals who are homebound and cannot travel to a vaccination site. We will share more details soon.

**Q: ­Do you have an update on the Johnson and Johnson vaccine­; As far as FDA emergency approval ­**

The Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) has been authorized use by the FDA and CDC. Massachusetts is receiving only one shipment of 58,000 doses for the month of March. These doses have been allocated – primarily to hospitals and health systems. Based on information the Commonwealth has received from the federal government, the Administration does not expect to be able to order more J&J doses until the end of March or early April.

In US and global studies, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine was 85% effective against severe disease.  It also provided 100% protection against hospitalization and death from COVID-19, and was shown to be effective against the new COVID-19 variants, with research conducted in countries with these more infectious variants including South Africa and Brazil.

**Q: ­I work with adults with disabilities on the North Shore, we have some clients who have behavioral issues and therefore cannot go to vaccine sites easily. Any advice or information on supporting these clients?**

The COVID-19 Command Center is developing a program to vaccinate individuals who are homebound and cannot travel to a vaccination site. We will share more details soon. In addition, MassHealth has made changes to its non-emergency transportation policy to expand eligibility and simplify processes for transportation to and from COVID-19 vaccine appointments.

* MassHealth is providing free transportation to vaccine appointments to any individual that has any type of MassHealth coverage or the Health Safety Net. This includes people with MassHealth Limited, Children’s Medical Security Program (CMSP) and MassHealth Family Assistance (FA).  In addition, members can request transportation services directly through MassHealth’s Customer Service, rather than needing to request services through a health care provider.
* If an individual has MassHealth or the Health Safety Net, they (or a caregiver) can be encouraged to call their health plan or MassHealth directly to schedule free transportation at 800-841-2900 (TTY: 800-497-4648).
* However, MassHealth members who are enrolled in a Senior Care Options or One Care plan or in a Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) should continue to contact their health plan or PACE provider to request help with transportation.

MassHealth [All Provider Bulletin 310](https://www.mass.gov/doc/all-provider-bulletin-310-transportation-for-members-to-vaccination-sites-for-coronavirus-0/download) and this [FAQ](https://www.mass.gov/doc/transportation-to-covid-19-vaccine-appointments-for-masshealth-members-and-health-safety-net-0/download) contain additional details on this policy, and members can visit the [MassHealth webpage](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/masshealth-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-applicants-and-members#information-on-covid-19-vaccines-) for more information on COVID-19 vaccines.​​​

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**Q: ­Only 40% of our direct care staff have been willing to take the vaccine. We have thousands of employees. What is the best method for trying to persuade or encourage staff in a congregate care program setting to take the vaccine?­**

There are a few websites and resources to help in these efforts, such as:

1. [Stop COVID-19 – Vaccine education and outreach materials | Mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/stop-covid-19-vaccine-education-and-outreach-materials): find educational materials that you can use in your outreach and messaging efforts, such as: answers to frequently asked questions, fliers, posters, and graphics, and a guide to hosting a forum on the vaccine.
2. [Trust the Facts. Get the Vax. | Mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/trust-the-facts-get-the-vax): Learn more about vaccine safety, how it was developed, and how it works.
3. CDC’s Vaccinate with Confidence page: [Building Confidence in COVID-19 Vaccines | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/vaccinate-with-confidence.html).

You may also request a DPH COVID-19 vaccine ambassador to attend a community forum you are hosting about the vaccine. Ambassadors are not necessarily vaccine experts or clinicians but are public health professionals with experience in community settings. Forum ambassadors can speak, answer questions, or listen to your feedback to share with DPH. If you would like to invite a DPH ambassador to your forum, please email Miguel at miguel.arrechea@mass.gov with the following information:

* + Date, time, and audience of the forum
	+ Desired role for the ambassador
	+ Language capacity or other important considerations

If possible, please request an ambassador at least 2 weeks before your forum. DPH will make every effort to fulfill requests.

**Q: ­Can people with developmental disability other than Down Syndrome qualify?**

The CDC has a list of conditions that cause people to be at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, which includes Down Syndrome as an eligible medical condition. Massachusetts has also identified moderate to severe asthma as an eligible medical condition. For the full list of conditions and more information on this topic, visit [COVID-19 vaccinations for individuals with certain medical conditions | Mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-vaccinations-for-individuals-with-certain-medical-conditions).

**Q: ­Was there a reason why Intellectual disability was not included just Down syndrome­**

The CDC has a list of conditions that cause people to be at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Massachusetts has also identified moderate to severe asthma as an eligible medical condition. For the full list of conditions and more information on this topic, visit [COVID-19 vaccinations for individuals with certain medical conditions | Mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-vaccinations-for-individuals-with-certain-medical-conditions). At this time, only Down Syndrome qualifies as an eligible medical condition.

**Q: ­It wasn't a very clear yes and no answer for pregnant women please. Is it safe for pregnant women to take the vaccine?­**

The [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](https://www.acog.org/en/clinical/clinical-guidance/practice-advisory/articles/2020/12/vaccinating-Pregnant-and-Lactating-Patients-Against-COVID-19) recommends that Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines be offered to pregnant individuals when they meet prioritization criteria for receiving the vaccine. ACOG has not yet made a recommendation on the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Getting vaccinated is a personal choice for people who are pregnant. COVID-19 infection during pregnancy can increase the risk of severe illness and might result in an increased risk of outcomes like preterm birth. Currently there are no data on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in people who are pregnant.

If you are pregnant and have questions around getting vaccinated, a discussion with your healthcare provider might help you make an informed decision.