

The COVID-19 vaccination priority guidelines give our profession a new and urgent way to help our patients stay healthy and safe, but we must act immediately. Hence this communication from the SCPS Public Affairs Committee.

Beginning March 15, people between ages 16 and 64 with medical conditions that increase their risks from COVID-19 will get vaccination priority.

**This includes patients with schizophrenia spectrum disorders;<sup>1</sup> patients living in homeless shelters, detention facilities, or behavioral health facilities; or are homeless and/or at risk of transitioning into congregate settings at short notice.**

The big challenge, however, is that people with these disabilities must be given tools to assert their priority status to vaccination services. Our patients must be made aware of their increased risk and informed of how to attest to having a disability when they get vaccinated. As psychiatrists, we can help by providing simple information about this to patients and families, perhaps with a brief description. An example would be:

*“I have a disability [or live in a homeless shelter, etc.] that increases my risk for severe COVID-19 infection. I understand that this condition makes me eligible to get COVID-19 vaccination.”*

SCPS is taking additional steps to inform private and governmental agencies of the unique challenges that our patients face in dealing with Covid-19 related morbidity, but these further actions will take more time. As Stacia Mills, MD, an SCPS member helping to lead these efforts notes, patients with severe disorders need our direct help in getting their vaccinations right now.

The tremendous impact that many serious psychiatric illnesses have on general health is often overlooked. These new guidelines give our profession the chance to help our community recognize the true illness burden carried by people with a major psychiatric disorder, and to provide our patients with help in staying healthy and safe. For further reference, here is the link the DPH Covid-19 vaccination priority guidelines:

[https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Provider-Bulletin-2-12-21.aspx?utm\\_campaign=20210224\\_COVID\\_VaccinationsUpdates10\\_Patients&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Eloqua](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Provider-Bulletin-2-12-21.aspx?utm_campaign=20210224_COVID_VaccinationsUpdates10_Patients&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Eloqua)

Ref:

1. Nemani K, Li C, Olfson M, et al. Association of Psychiatric Disorders with Mortality Among Patients with COVID-19. JAMA Psychiatry. Published online January 27, 2021. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.4442.