



For people with intellectual  
and developmental disabilities

The Arc of Massachusetts  
217 South Street  
Waltham, MA 02453-2710

T: 781.891.6270  
F: 781-891.6271  
arcmass@arcmass.org  
www.arcmass.org

**Achieve with us.**

Scott Borchardt  
President

Leo V. Sarkissian  
Executive Director

## Press Statement – For Immediate Release

### For more information contact:

Leo Sarkissian, [sarkissian@arcmass.org](mailto:sarkissian@arcmass.org), 617.838.8832

Maura Sullivan, [sullivan@arcmass.org](mailto:sullivan@arcmass.org), 781.530.8274

### Urgent Need to Prioritize Persons with I/DD and Their Caregivers for the COVID-19 Vaccine

The Arc of Massachusetts (The Arc)<sup>i</sup> stresses *the urgent need for the Commonwealth to prioritize all individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and autism and their caregivers during Phase 2 of vaccine distribution in Massachusetts.* Over the last year, medical professionals and research studies have overwhelmingly recognized that the following conditions: I/DD, Autism, Down syndrome, Neurological conditions, and Acquired Brain Injury, increase an individual's risk of serious complications and death from COVID-19.<sup>ii</sup>

On March 5, 2021 another study revealed the severe impact on COVID-19 for those with I/DD.<sup>iii</sup> This study of over 64 million patients across 547 health care organizations reveals that having an intellectual disability is the greatest risk factor, other than old age, associated with COVID-19 deaths. In a Disability Scoop article dated March 10, 2021, Jonathan Gleason, chief quality officer at Jefferson Health in Philadelphia and the lead author of this study states that “The chances of dying from COVID-19 are higher for those with intellectual disability than they are for people with congestive heart failure, kidney disease or lung disease.”<sup>iv</sup> Still the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Commonwealth's COVID-19 Task Force have failed to prioritize them.

Just as elderly individuals who are at a higher risk for COVID-19 have been prioritized along with their caregivers, individuals with I/DD and autism and their caregivers must be prioritized to keep our community safe and reduce the spread of COVID-19. It does not make sense that a woman with an intellectual disability and has co-morbid diagnoses that puts her in the medically fragile and complex category cannot access the vaccine because her co-morbidities are not ones listed on the CDC or Mass.gov COVID-19 eligibility list.

Over 2,700 letters have been sent by The Arc community to the state leadership and legislature regarding this need for prioritization. A mother of an individual with autism and an intellectual disability shares with The Arc that her adult son has been home since March 2020 and that even with a higher risk of getting COVID-19, he cannot get the vaccine. She sent a letter to her state legislator, and it is now March 2021 and still no sign of him getting it. If he were in a group home or residential setting, he would have had it. It doesn't seem fair!

---

<sup>i</sup> The Arc of Massachusetts (The Arc) is a statewide advocacy organization representing 200,000 individuals and their families with 17 chapters in the state. Our mission is to enhance the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including autism, and their families. We fulfill this through advocacy for community supports and services that foster social inclusion, self-determination, and equity across all aspects of society.

---

<sup>ii</sup> Emily Hotez, Peter J. Hotez, Kashia A. Rosenau, Alice A. Kuo, Prioritizing COVID-19 vaccinations for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, *EClinicalMedicine*, 2021, 100749, ISSN 2589-5370, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclinm.2021.100749>. (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2589537021000298>)

<sup>iii</sup> Jonathan Gleason, MD, Wendy Ross, MD, Alexander Fossi, MPHc, Heather Blonsky, MAS, Jane Tobias, DNP, RN, MSN, CPNP-PC & Mary Stephens, MD, "The Devastating Impact of Covid-19 on Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities in the United States," *New England Journal of Medicine Catalyst*, March 5, 2021, <https://catalyst.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/CAT.21.0051>.

<sup>iv</sup> *Intellectual Disability Among Greatest COVID-19 Risk Factors, Study Finds*, Disability Scoop, Shaun Heasley, March 10, 2021, available at <https://www.disabilityscoop.com/2021/03/10/intellectual-disability-among-greatest-covid-19-risk-factors-study-finds/29234/>