

March 8, 2021

Karen Timberlake, Secretary
Department of Health Services
1 W. Wilson St.
Madison, WI 53703

Via email at: Karen.Timberlake@dhs.wisconsin.gov

RE: Vaccine Eligibility for People with Chronic Conditions

Dear Secretary Timberlake,

We understand that the Department of Health Services is currently preparing to announce who will next be eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine. We write to urge that people with chronic medical conditions under the age of 65 be given first priority in the next phase of the vaccine rollout.

After age, certain conditions are the next highest predictor of death or serious illness from COVID-19. According to the CDC, specific conditions about which there is consensus on increased risk are:

- Cancer
- Chronic kidney disease
- COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
- Down Syndrome
- Heart conditions, such as heart failure, coronary artery disease, or cardiomyopathies
- Immunocompromised state (weakened immune system) from solid organ transplant
- Obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 30 kg/m² or higher but < 40 kg/m²)
- Severe Obesity (BMI ≥ 40 kg/m²)
- Pregnancy
- Sickle cell disease
- Smoking addiction
- Type 2 diabetes mellitus

Another set of conditions, again per the CDC, for which the data is not as conclusive, but which are very likely to be high risk conditions are:

- Asthma (moderate-to-severe)
- Cerebrovascular disease (affects blood vessels and blood supply to the brain)
- Cystic fibrosis
- Hypertension or high blood pressure

Karen Timberlake
March 8, 2021

Immunocompromised state (weakened immune system) from blood or bone marrow transplant, immune deficiencies, HIV, use of corticosteroids, or use of other immune weakening medicines

Neurologic conditions, such as dementia

Liver disease

Overweight (BMI > 25 kg/m², but < 30 kg/m²)

Pulmonary fibrosis (having damaged or scarred lung tissues)

Thalassemia (a type of blood disorder)

Type 1 diabetes mellitus

In addition, the DHS SDMAC previously identified (see: "Phase 1a Guidance") two additional conditions that correlate to illness or death from COVID. They are:

Intellectual disability, and
Chronic metabolic disease

We urge DHS to include all of the above conditions in the list of qualifying conditions for the vaccine. We also urge DHS to adopt a flexible approach to this group and be open to adding conditions to the list of qualifying conditions as we learn more about the interrelationship between COVID and other conditions. Finally, if there is to be a priority order in the next phase of eligibility, we urge this group to be the first priority.

Since it appears that the Vaccine Subcommittee of the SDMAC will not be reconvened to recommend the make-up of the next group and there will be no formal public comment period relating to the next group, we felt obliged to contact you directly. We feel the Vaccine Subcommittee would have adopted an approach similar to what we have suggested here.

Younger people with chronic medical and other conditions need to begin receiving vaccine as soon as possible.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Lea Kitz
Executive Director