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DIVISION OF PUBLIC AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
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Technical Bulletin

Date: March 3, 2021

Topic: Update to Nevada State Immunization Program Guidance on Vaccine Access for Nevadans with Underlying Health Conditions

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To: All Health Care Providers, Local Health Authorities, and Pharmacists

March 3, 2021 UPDATE TO GUIDANCE TO THE NEVADA COVID-19 VACCINATION PLAYBOOK

People with Underlying Health Conditions

The Nevada State Immunization Program (NSIP) worked with the Public Health Preparedness Program and the Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Section to identify people with underlying health conditions; NSIP will continue to engage these partners to message about vaccine confidence and availability to those with underlying health conditions. Additionally, NSIP reached out to a wide variety of partners across the state seeking help in reaching this population once a vaccine is available, including health insurers who can easily and quickly reach covered members. NSIP maintains this list and is engaging partners in the planning process as appropriate.

Scientists are learning more about COVID-19 every day. NSIP is using guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding people with certain medical conditions and their risks of severe illness or death from COVID-19. The below lists of underlying medical conditions are not exhaustive and only include conditions with sufficient evidence to draw conclusions; it is a living document that may be updated at any time, subject to potentially rapid change as the science evolves.

The lists created by CDC are meant to inform clinicians to help them provide the best care possible for patients and to inform individuals about their level of risk so they can make individual decisions about illness prevention. Notably, the list may not include every condition that might increase one's risk for developing severe illness from COVID-19, such as those for which evidence may be limited (e.g., rare conditions).

On March 1st, 2021, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) released the following considerations for reaching and vaccinating those with underlying health conditions. NSIP is using the updated ACIP guidance to make the following recommendations for vaccinating the Phase 1c group encompassing those 16-64 years with an underlying health condition:

- **CHALLENGE** – It is difficult to screen for underlying health conditions at large vaccination centers.
- **RECOMMENDATION** – Medical care homes and primary care providers may be better able to assess a patient's eligibility based on their underlying medical conditions.

- CHALLENGE – How to implement a vaccine program to reach those on the CDC’s list(s) of high-risk conditions?
- **RECOMMENDATION** – The CDC list relies on published studies and is not exhaustive. Certain high-risk conditions on the list encompass a wide range of severity. **Clinical judgment may determine if rare conditions not on the list confer increased risk of severe COVID-19.**
- CHALLENGE – The total size of the group comprised of 16-64 years with underlying health conditions exceeds the available vaccine supply.
- **RECOMMENDATION** – **NSIP supports the counties in prioritizing subsets of age groups in the < 65 years group, e.g., moving methodically from serving those 65 years and older to including all those 55 years and older. NSIP also supports prioritizing Nevadans with 2 or more of the listed underlying health conditions while vaccine supply remains low.**

As the vaccine supply allows and local immunization coverage rates continue to increase, NSIP is recommending that mass vaccination events use an age-based criterion when expanding capacity, following the recommendation above. Concurrently, NSIP is beginning to recruit and enroll more community and specialized healthcare providers (e.g., cancer centers, dialysis centers, etc.) who can be ready to stock and administer COVID vaccine(s) to their eligible patients.

This recommendation is meant to respect clinical judgment and the patient-provider relationship for those who have an underlying condition and a medical provider or pharmacist they trust. It also recognizes the challenge of screening for underlying conditions in a public POD setting and avoids situations where HIPAA-protected information may be disclosed or exposed to inappropriate parties.

Individuals with any underlying medical condition (including those conditions that are NOT on the current CDC lists) should consult with their healthcare providers about personal risk factors and circumstances to determine whether extra precautions are warranted.

As of March 1st, 2021, NSIP is formally including CDC’s list of specific underlying health conditions which mean a person [might be at an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19](#):

- [Asthma \(moderate to severe\)](#) - People with moderate to severe asthma may be at higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19. COVID-19 can affect your nose, throat, lungs (respiratory tract); cause an asthma attack; and possibly lead to pneumonia and acute respiratory disease.
- [Cerebrovascular Disease, Hypertension, or High Blood Pressure](#) - Having other cardiovascular or cerebrovascular disease, such as hypertension (high blood pressure) or stroke, might increase your risk of severe illness from COVID-19.
- [Cystic or Pulmonary Fibrosis](#) - Other chronic lung diseases, such as idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis and cystic fibrosis, might increase your risk of severe illness from COVID-19.
- [Immunocompromised from blood or bone marrow transplant, immune deficiencies, HIV, use of corticosteroids, or use of other immune weakening medicines](#) - Many conditions and treatments can cause a person to be immunocompromised or have a weakened immune system. These include having a solid organ transplant, blood, or bone marrow transplant; immune deficiencies; HIV with a low CD4 cell count or not on HIV treatment; prolonged use of corticosteroids; or use of other immune weakening medicines. Having a weakened immune system might increase your risk of severe illness from COVID-19.
- [Neurologic conditions, such as Dementia](#) - Having neurologic conditions such as dementia might increase your risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Older adults have the highest rates of dementia and are at higher risk for severe illness or death from COVID-19.

- [Liver Disease](#) - Having chronic liver disease, such as alcohol-related liver disease, nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, and especially cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), might increase your risk for severe illness from COVID-19.
- [Overweight \(BMI > 25 kg/m2, but < 30 kg/m2\)](#) - Having an overweight status, defined as a BMI > 25 kg/m2 but less than 30 kg/m2 might increase your risk of severe illness from COVID-19.
- [Thalassemia \(a blood disorder\)](#) - Having other hemoglobin disorders, like thalassemia, might increase your risk for severe illness from COVID-19 because you have a weakened immune system.
- [Type 1 Diabetes mellitus](#) - Based on what is known at this time, having type 1 or gestational diabetes might increase your risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

NSIP continues to use CDC guidance to identify and prioritize the specific underlying health conditions causing a person to be at [increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19](#):

- [Cancer](#) – Anyone currently undergoing treatment for cancer is at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. People with cancer who are treated with chemotherapy are at more risk because of their weakened immune system. An estimated 16,450 Nevadans were newly diagnosed with cancer in 2020 (American Cancer Society Facts and Figures, 2020).
- [Chronic Kidney Disease](#) – Anyone with Chronic Kidney Disease at any stage is at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 because they have a weakened immune system.
- [COPD \(chronic obstructive pulmonary disease\), Cystic Fibrosis, Pulmonary Fibrosis, and other chronic lung diseases](#) – Anyone with COPD or a related chronic lung disease at any stage is at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 because they specifically have very weak lung health, and COVID-19 is a respiratory disease (i.e., a disease that targets the lungs).
- [Down Syndrome](#) - Revisions were made on December 23, 2020 to reflect recent data supporting increased risk of severe illness among persons with Down syndrome from the virus that causes COVID-19.
- [Heart conditions, such as heart failure, coronary heart disease, or cardiomyopathies](#) – Anyone with any heart condition, including hypertension (high blood pressure) or stroke, could have an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 because they have weakened immune systems. In Nevada, cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of disease and death among adults.
- [Immunocompromised from solid organ transplant](#) – Anyone who has had a solid organ transplant is at risk of having a weakened immune system, because the body is relearning with the new organ, which increases their risk for severe illness from COVID-19.
- [Obesity \(Body Mass Index, BMI, of 30-39\) and Severe Obesity \(BMI of 40 or greater\)](#) – Obesity and severe obesity are risk factors for many chronic conditions and increase a person’s risk of suffering severe illness from COVID-19. According to 2019 data from the Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance System (BRFSS), approximately 30% of Nevada adults are considered obese based on BMI.
- [Pregnancy](#) - Based on what we know at this time, pregnant people are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 compared to non-pregnant people. Additionally, there might be an increased risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes, such as preterm birth, among pregnant people with COVID-19.
- [Sickle Cell Disease](#) – Anyone who has been diagnosed with sickle cell disease is at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 because they have a weakened immune system.
- [Type 2 Diabetes mellitus](#) – People who have a blood sugar level (A1C) between 5.7% and 6.4% are in the prediabetes stage and anyone with an A1C level higher than 6.5% is indicated to have diabetes. Having Type 2 diabetes, specifically, weakens the immune system and puts the person at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Having Type 1 or gestational diabetes might increase the risk of severe illness. In 2019,

approximately 11% of adults in Nevada reported being told by a health professional they have diabetes (excluding prediabetes and gestational diabetes).

- [Smoking](#) – Smoking is a risk factor for many chronic conditions and can increase a person’s risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Smoking weakens lung health and COVID-19 is a respiratory disease (i.e., a disease that targets the lungs). Both former (have smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetime) and current (smoke cigarettes every day or some days) smokers face heightened risk. From the most recent data available (2016 BRFSS), approximately 17% of adults in Nevada reported smoking.

Questions:

For updated guidance, please review the DPBH Technical Bulletin [website](#) and Nevada’s COVID-19 response [website](#) regularly.

If you have questions about your county's specific vaccine rollout plan, please email COVIDVaxHelp@immunizenevada.org.

A statewide call center is also available to help answer your questions and guide you to a vaccination provider if you are eligible to receive the vaccine based on your county’s plans. Please call 1-800-401-0946 for assistance with any COVID-19 vaccination or testing questions.



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