

## EDITORIAL

# Have we forgotten about the Person with Disabilities for COVID 19 Vaccination – A need of the hour!!!

Abhijit Vinodrao Boratne<sup>1</sup>, Karthikayini Sasinthar<sup>2</sup>,

<sup>1</sup>Professor & Head, Department of Community Medicine, Mahatma Gandhi Medical College and Research Institute, Puducherry-607402, <sup>2</sup>Postgraduate, Department of Community Medicine, Mahatma Gandhi Medical College and Research Institute, Puducherry-607402.

|                          |                              |                             |                         |                            |                            |                          |                                  |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <a href="#">Abstract</a> | <a href="#">Introduction</a> | <a href="#">Methodology</a> | <a href="#">Results</a> | <a href="#">Conclusion</a> | <a href="#">References</a> | <a href="#">Citation</a> | <a href="#">Tables / Figures</a> |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|

## Corresponding Author

Dr. Abhijit Vinodrao Boratne, Professor & Head, Department of Community Medicine, Mahatma Gandhi Medical College & Research Institute, Puducherry -607402  
E Mail ID: [abhijitboratne@gmail.com](mailto:abhijitboratne@gmail.com)



## Citation

Boratne AV, Karthikayini S, Have we forgotten about the Person with Disabilities for COVID 19 Vaccination – A need of the hour!!!. Indian J Comm Health. 2021;33(1):01-02. <https://doi.org/10.47203/IJCH.2021.v33i01.001>

Source of Funding: Nil Conflict of Interest: None declared

## Article Cycle

Received: 03/03/2021; Revision: 15/03/2021; Accepted: 21/03/2021; Published: 31/03/2021

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

## Abstract

Persons with disabilities (PwDs) are less likely to access health care facilities, education, and employment in their day-to-day life. They are more likely to experience higher rates of neglect and abuse. The present COVID-19 pandemic situation has further affected the PwDs in terms of physical and social neglect. Moreover, the concept of social distancing, using a face mask, and following cough hygiene, which is fundamental in controlling the spread of COVID 19, is likely to be followed by the person with an intellectual impairment since they are highly dependent on their caretakers for their day to day activities. This scenario is even worse with PwDs who are living in congregate settings like residential camps, nursing facilities, and psychiatric institutions where infectivity is very higher. Thus a pronged approach is needed to assure that PwDs are not left behind during the times of pandemic. This paper argues that PwDs, because of their increased risk for exposure to COVID-19 and its consequences of developing morbidity and even possible deaths, should be prioritized in vaccination strategies. Otherwise, they will be left behind, experiencing disproportionate loss of lives and livelihoods, inaccessible health care services, and disconnection from society.

## Introduction

### Impact of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities

World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak as pandemic on March 11, 2020.(1) Control of this explosive spread of COVID 19 is now an alarming global public health concern. In the course of this pandemic, the elderly, pregnant women, and people who are homeless are identified as vulnerable groups.(2,3,4) Less attention has been given to the PwDs who have a range of difficulties such as health problems, mental disorders, and social neglect. WHO claims PwDs as vulnerable individuals during times of public health emergency. Institutional, environmental and social barriers in times of public health emergencies, affect the basic rights of persons with

disabilities. This has been extensively documented during the global COVID-19 pandemic.(5)

Depending on underlying health conditions, PwDs may be at greater risk of developing more severe COVID-19 if they become infected. This is because COVID-19 exacerbates existing health conditions, particularly those who have underlying respiratory, cardiovascular comorbidities.(6) Due to restrictions caused by COVID-19, many persons with disabilities who were working in informal sectors could not adapt to the new working conditions such as physical distancing at the workplace lost their livelihood, and face financial crisis. Other persons with disabilities who require personal assistance experience serious difficulties in carrying out daily activities or, due to lack of governmental support, have to rely on family members which may weaken

their independence.(7)The persons who are visually challenged are simply detached from the world to a large extent because in-person interpretation is not possible due to physical distancing.(8)

### COVID 19 vaccination roll-out plan

World Health Organization (WHO) and its partners are working together in controlling this pandemic. Vaccines that save millions of lives each year have rolled across the countries in combating this pandemic. Vaccines work by preparing the body's natural defenses the immune system to recognize and fight off the disease agent target. After vaccination, if the body is exposed to those disease-causing agent the body immediately recognizes and destroy them, and prevent illness.(9)Vulnerable populations in all countries are the highest priority for vaccination. Centre of Disease Control has recommended COVID 19 vaccination to the people in a phased manner as, in Phase 1a Health care personnel, in Phase 1b Frontline essential workers and people above 75 years of age, in phase 1c people between 65 to 74 years of age, people aged 16 to 64 years of age having underlying comorbidity and other essential workers will receive the vaccination.(10) Notably absent from these Phased guidelines are the persons with disability. There are about one billion people who live with some form of disability which accounts for 15% of the world's population.(11) The exclusion of PwD from these guidelines represents inequality in accessing public health services.

Due to social and physical barriers, the last group of people accessing public health services will be persons with disabilities. It should be ensured that the global vaccination roll-out being developed should be distributed equally, leaving no one behind. At first, a targeted approach should be designed to ensure that all types of a disabled persons receive COVID 19 vaccine in a phased manner. Hence prioritization is needed in assessing COVID 19 vaccination.

### Recommendations for universal accessibility of COVID 19 vaccination for people with a disability:

1. Information regarding COVID-19 Vaccine Intelligence Work (Co WIN) registration system should accessible to Persons with Disability.
2. Accessible Health care facility to receive COVID 19 vaccine should identified and made readily available with all sets of criteria.
3. Vaccination site should be a friendly environment for Pwd or receiving vaccinations.
4. COVID-19 vaccination must be made available free of cost in al health care sectors.

5. Informed consent should be obtained from caregivers of Intellectually Disabled people.
6. Support networks should be developed to help PwDs to receive the vaccination.
7. Organizations like special schools for the persons with disabilities must be resourced to become partners in the COVID 19 vaccination roll-out campaigns.

### Conclusion

This pandemic situation has drawn attention to the sad reality that we failed to prioritize the Persons with Disability in COVID-19 vaccination rollout plan. Thus a Humanitarian approach is needed by all the International and National policymakers to bring justice to these vulnerable individuals in times of this pandemic.

### References

1. World Health Organization. Novel Coronavirus—China. Available online at: <https://www.who.int/csr/don/12-january-2020-novel-coronavirus-china/en/> (accessed February, 2021).
2. Kirby T. Efforts escalate to protect homeless people from COVID-19 in UK. *The Lancet Respiratory Medicine*. 2020 May 1;8(5):447-9.
3. Qiao J. What are the risks of COVID-19 infection in pregnant women?. *The Lancet*. 2020 Mar 7; 395(10226):760-2.
4. World Health Organization. Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak, 18 March 2020. World Health Organization; 2020.
5. Emerson E, Hatton C. Socioeconomic disadvantage, social participation and networks and the self-rated health of English men and women with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities: cross sectional survey. *European Journal of Public Health*. 2008 Feb 1;18(1):31-7
6. World Health Organization. Disability considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak. World Health Organization; 2020.
7. Senjam SS. A Persons-Centered Approach for Prevention of COVID-19 Disease and Its Impacts in Persons with Disabilities. *Front. Public Health* 8:608958. doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2020.608958
8. Senjam SS. Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on people living with visual disability. *Indian journal of ophthalmology*. 2020;68(7):1367.
9. World Health Organization. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Vaccine access and allocation [Internet]. World Health Organization. [cited 2021 Feb 28]. Available from: [https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-\(covid-19\)-vaccine-access-and-allocation](https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-vaccine-access-and-allocation)
10. Center Disease Control. When Vaccine is Limited, Who Gets Vaccinated First? [Internet]. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2021 [cited 2021 Feb 28]. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations.html>
11. World Health Organization. Global disability action plan 2014-2021 [Internet]. WHO. World Health Organization; 2014 [cited 2021 Feb 2021]. Available from: <http://www.who.int/disabilities/actionplan/en/>