

February 11, 2021

Governor Walz and Commissioner Malcolm:

We appreciate all that you have both done to keep Minnesotans safe during this unprecedented time of crisis and we are grateful for all you have done to support Minnesota's hospitals and for your commitment to the safety of everyone in our state.

While we appreciate the challenges presented by COVID-19, and most recently, the challenges of ensuring equitable and timely allocation of the COVID vaccines, we are concerned about the current guidelines for individuals with disabilities.

We urge you to either include in 1A as a fourth priority or to include immediately in 1B:

**People 16-64 years of age who have an underlying health condition or disability which increases their risk of severe COVID-19 and caregivers of people of any age who have an underlying health condition or disability which increases their risk of severe COVID-19.**

We suggest that an underlying health condition or disability that should be considered prioritized for a vaccine includes:

- any health condition or disability requiring a person to maintain caregivers in their household
- any health condition or disability which prevents mask wearing and proper social distancing and hand hygiene
- truncal muscle weakness or spasticity inhibiting chest excursion and ability to cough
- immunodeficiency
- lung disease or pulmonary disease
- cardiac disease
- renal disease
- neurological and neurologic and neurodevelopment conditions

People ages 16-64 with disabilities and underlying health conditions at higher risk of COVID-19 who do not live in an institutional or other licensed or segregated setting were not prioritized in 1A, even though under Minnesota's Olmstead Plan we are working as a state to ensure people with disabilities are living, learning, working, and enjoying life in the most integrated setting possible. We believe individuals, ages 16-64 who live independently should be prioritized for vaccines, as they are in many other states, to ensure equitable protection for this medically vulnerable population.

**Clinic locations:**

Brainerd Lakes  
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While we recognize that a vaccine has not yet been approved for the pediatric population, we also ask that you prioritize the families and informal caregivers who are supporting children with disabilities and complex medical conditions that place them at a higher risk. We recommend the strategy of “cocooning” around children with disabilities and complex medical conditions with vaccine administration prioritized for adult caregivers and family members living in the same household that are at the approved vaccine age.

We also know that for both children and adults with disabilities and underlying health conditions at higher risk of COVID-19 who depend on unpaid caregivers, if that unpaid caregiver becomes sick or hospitalized that child or adult may be forced to live in a less integrated setting.

The status of an underlying health condition or disability could be verified through a medical record or by a letter or documentation from a treating provider.

As a specialty hospital focused on treating conditions that are complex, rare and traumatic we ask you to please consider the needs and well-being of our patients and their families and the specialty care expertise behind our recommendation.

The pandemic continues to offer our community new challenges. The team at Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare is available to provide additional information or provide assistance to you and your teams. I know you are faced with several complex and emotionally charged decisions every day and sincerely appreciate all that you do to optimize limited resources in our battle against COVID-19.

Thank you again for all you are doing.

Sincerely,



Barbara Joers  
President and CEO

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