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Dear DDS Community:

We are all so relieved that the COVID-19 vaccines are here. As I'm sure you know, this is the largest, most significant vaccination effort in history. The complexities are being experienced across the country. Here in Massachusetts, the rollout and vaccinations have already begun. The [Massachusetts COVID-19 Advisory Group](#) has determined a [phased priority](#) for distribution. I want to share our plans for making vaccinations available to your loved ones and the staff who care for them.

### **Phase One**

- **Week of January 18<sup>th</sup>**

The vaccinations of both residents and staff of DDS residential [congregate care](#) programs will begin.

- **Early February**

The vaccinations of home-based healthcare workers will begin. For DDS this includes shared living providers, home-based respite, individual/family support staff who provide in-home services, and participants who self-direct their services.

### **Phase Two**

- Individuals with two or more chronic diseases or conditions (comorbidities) and adults over the age of 75
- Adults over the age of 65
- Individuals with one chronic disease or condition (comorbidity)

There will be several methods used to distribute the vaccine. Some of our residential congregate care providers are part of the Federal Pharmacy Partnership Programs where vaccinations will be provided by either CVS or Walgreens and in some cases those vaccinations have already begun. Some providers are securing partnerships with a local pharmacy or healthcare provider such as a local hospital or community health center. In addition, Massachusetts is in the process of setting up Mass Vaccinations Sites across the state. This vaccination program is complex and the timing will vary by provider. DDS is committed to working with our providers to ensure vaccination is made available as soon as possible.

Important facts you need to know:

- Vaccines go through more testing than any other pharmaceuticals, including extensive testing in rigorous clinical trials to prove their efficacy and safety.
- Infectious disease experts at academic medical centers in Massachusetts convened a Task Force to provide the Commonwealth with an independent, non-governmental evaluation of each COVID-19 vaccine approved under Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). Following its review of the safety and efficacy data, the Task Force unanimously recommended that the Commonwealth deploy the Pfizer and Moderna vaccine.
- Vaccination is voluntary for staff and residents.
- We will be seeking consent from legal guardians prior to individuals we serve receiving the vaccine.
- Surveillance testing and infection control measures including the use of face masks and PPE, hand hygiene, and social distancing will remain in place until further notice.

Below are helpful links that are updated on a regular basis:

- COVID Vaccine FAQ: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-vaccine-frequently-asked-questions-vaccine-providers>
- Phases/prioritization: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/when-can-i-get-the-covid-19-vaccine>
- Vaccine Fact Sheets in multiple languages: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/stop-covid-19-vaccine-graphics>
- Weekly Data Dashboard: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-vaccination-program#weekly-covid-19-vaccination-report->
- Vaccinations for Congregate Care: [mass.gov/congregatecarevaccine](https://www.mass.gov/congregatecarevaccine)

I know that we are all anxious to receive the vaccination and for our lives to return to some sort of normalcy. This effort will take time and patience. I am committed to sharing information and providing regular updates. In the meantime, we all need to stay vigilant and continue to wear masks, wash our hands, and avoid large and indoor gatherings. With your help, I am confident that we will get through this.

Jane