

January 13, 2021

Dr. Bonnie Henry
Office of the Provincial Health Officer
Ministry of Health
PO Box 9648, STN PROV GOVT
1515 Blanshard St.,
Victoria BC, V8W 9P4

Dear Dr. Henry,

I am writing on behalf of British Columbians with Down syndrome to recommend that this especially vulnerable population, and in particular individuals over the age of 40, be prioritized in the province's COVID-19 vaccination allocation plans.

We sincerely appreciate the efforts being made by you and your team to keep our communities safe amid a changing and very complex health crisis. To support your efforts, and our recommendations, we would like to provide the following information about Down syndrome and how people with Down syndrome are especially at risk due to COVID-19.

Of the studies and research conducted in 2020 focused on COVID-19 and individuals with Down syndrome, the most striking was published in the [Annals of Internal Medicine](#). As this study revealed, despite Down syndrome not currently being recognized as an "increased risk" group, it is. Given the condition's association with immune dysfunction, congenital heart disease, and pulmonary pathology and, its prevalence, it is a risk factor for severe COVID-19. **The most alarming statistic is a COVID-19 mortality rate among adults with Down syndrome that is 10X higher than those without Down syndrome.** It is also known that individuals with Down syndrome develop the high-risk medical conditions of the aged in their 40's, seen in the typical population in their 70's. As a result, we strongly recommend that adults with Down syndrome over the age of 40 be considered high priority for vaccination and believe this is consistent with the province's strategy to reduce deaths first.

Further, for both physical and mental health reasons, we recommend that individuals with Down syndrome between the ages of 16 and 39 be given priority consideration. Those in this age group are also known to have associated immune dysfunction, congenital heart disease, and pulmonary pathology. Additionally, developmental disabilities are a common characteristic of Down syndrome, which makes this population especially at risk of pandemic-related mental health problems. DSRF provides mental health services for individuals with Down syndrome and we see first-hand how all the mitigating steps necessary to control the pandemic disproportionately affect the lives of people with conditions like Down syndrome. For many individuals with developmental disabilities, receiving essential services like DSRF's mental health support, speech and occupational therapy, in-person is critical to healthy outcomes. However, with a developmental disability, wearing a mask and social distancing can be problematic and even impossible, meaning in-person services are not an option. As a result, we recommend vaccinating individuals in this age group as soon as possible to prevent further, prolonged, and even long-term mental health problems.

In conclusion, there is evidence that adults with Down syndrome over age 40 should be included with the prioritization recommendations for all adults of advanced age and that individuals with any high risk for severe illness, including those with Down syndrome, over the age of 16 should also be prioritized. To date, other than allergy, no contra-indication to administering the vaccine to individuals with Down syndrome has been reported.

Thank you again for your efforts to keep our community, and all British Columbians, safe in these unprecedented times. DSRF continues to promote all public health measures and encourages individuals to discuss receiving a vaccine with their primary care provider.

Yours sincerely,



Wayne Leslie
CEO

Down Syndrome Resource Foundation

c.c. Hon. Adrian Dix
Minister of Health

Hon. Katrina Chen
Minister of State for Child Care & MLA, Burnaby-Lougheed