

## **ACS Corona Virus Preparedness Update – February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

### **Dear ACS Partners and Families,**

Over the last several weeks there has been a buzz in the air as questions regarding COVID 19 immunizations have been on the rise. We understand and share your frustration that individuals with disabilities have not yet been included on the priority list. Please know that we are actively following these communications and advocating that our participants be granted access to immunization. That being said, we wanted to take a few minutes to share with you what our plans are moving forward.

### **Participant Vaccines**

At the current time only program participants who are in a congregate residential setting (group home, ICF, nursing home) are eligible for vaccination. Those who are not in one of these settings, may be eligible based on age or severe respiratory health conditions which increase the danger of getting COVID-19 to the person compared to the general population.

If you or your loved one lives in a congregate setting, please reach out to that provider for access to the vaccine. Others should reach out directly to the County Health Department or their medical provider. We urge all our program participants to reach out to their medical professional for consultation prior to vaccination to discuss possible interactions or concerns.

### **Staff Vaccinations**

ACS staff, along with other direct care professionals, have been classified as health care workers and have been able to obtain vaccinations. Due to discrimination and HIPAA regulations most entities including hospitals, nursing homes and others alike are unable to require that staff get vaccinated and to reduce risk of discrimination do not track who has or has not received the vaccination.

### **Vaccination is a Private and Personal Choice**

There are many reasons people may not want to get vaccinated including females of childbearing age, those who have had allergic reactions in the past, religious beliefs and more. Because employment laws prohibit discrimination based on age, sex or religious beliefs unless there is a documented and immediate safety hazard which does not exist in this case, employers are generally advised not to make this or most other vaccinations a requirement of employment.

### **Short Term Outlook**

We are in communication with the State Health Department and will be alerted of each progressive priority list as it is released by the Governor's office. Once approval is granted for our participants to receive immunization, Ability and Choice Services will be partnering with a

local pharmacy to create pop up immunization clinics at our various day hubs. Access to vaccinations will be made available to **all ACS participants** that wish to receive the vaccine.

We know that as of today, February 4, 2021, it was announced that the list will be expanded as of March 1, 2021 however the details of this list have not been released in their entirety. There are no guarantees that our served population will be included on this round of priorities but rest assured that as soon as they are, and we are able to solidify a schedule to assist you in accessing vaccination, we will be contacting you via email.

In the meantime, until such time when masks are not required for all persons regardless of vaccination or antibody status, we plan on keeping the mask requirement in order so as not to spotlight those who cannot or have chosen not to obtain the vaccine and may be in a legally protected class from discrimination.

We will adjust our precautions as the community risk level changes and will communicate in future messages when and what changes are being made.

### **Return to Programs**

We realize many of our participants living in congregate care settings are getting their vaccinations. We urge everyone who is admitted to one of our programs, but has not been coming, to contact their program or the main office to start the re-enrollment process.

There are many factors in scheduling and coordinating the return to services. We want the return to be as smooth as possible and may need to stagger return dates to ensure success for everyone in that process. Some of the considerations we are making include:

- New PCSP/team meeting to discuss any medical, staffing and behavioral needs, updating contact information and to reviewing annual paperwork.
- possibly creating new temporary goals keeping in mind restricted community access and physical distancing requirements related to COVID
- Ensure we have the proper staffing and transportation options available, which may require re-hiring, recruiting, and training new staff
- Evaluating program capacity based on current recommended precautions for social distancing. Emotional and behavioral wellbeing of those re-adjusting to the Day Hub or other services and the ability of staff to provide quality interaction with returning participants