**COVID Vaccines For People With Learning Disabilities**

**Position Statement/Expert Advice From The UKLDCNN**

There has been much attention drawn to the premature and avoidable deaths of people with learning disabilities who continue to experience health inequalities and death by discrimination in the UK today.

People with learning disabilities have clearly been identified as being at greater risk of dying from Covid 19 than the general population regardless of the level of learning disability they have. The higher rate has now been consistently recorded in three studies;

* the [Office For National statistics](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronaviruscovid19relateddeathsbydisabilitystatusenglandandwales/24januaryto20november2020) when reviewing deaths between January 2020 and November 2020, people with learning disabilities were 3.7 times more likely to die
* [Public Health England](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-deaths-of-people-with-learning-disabilities/covid-19-deaths-of-people-identified-as-having-learning-disabilities-summary) in November 2020 found this to be 3.6 times higher.
* Preliminary findings from the [Scottish Learning Disability Observatory](https://www.sldo.ac.uk/our-research/life-expectancy-and-mortality/covid-19/) (subject to peer review) has also identified that people in the learning/intellectual disabilities population were more than three times more likely to die from COVID-19 than those in the general population

Additionally the Scottish study found that

* People with learning/intellectual disabilities were twice as likely as those in the general population to become infected with COVID-19
* People with learning/intellectual disabilities were also twice as likely to experience a severe outcome of COVID-19 infection, resulting in hospitalisation and/or death

The JCVI has identified that people with a severe/profound learning disability should be invited for vaccination in priority group 6. There is recognition from self-advocates, families and professionals who support people with learning disabilities that this is challenging due to the lack of an operational definition of severe/profound learning disabilities and challenges with primary care coding and identification. **The UKLDCNN believe that it would be an inefficient use of resource to focus on identifying those with severe/profound learning disabilities when there could be a clear focus using those same resources for vaccinating all people with learning disabilities instead.**

Stakeholder groups have already highlighted the ‘postcode lottery’ and inequality in the first roll out of the vaccines (group 1-4) where for example people with learning disabilities living in care homes could have been vaccinated while the rest of the older population there were having the vaccine, sometimes this happened and sometimes it didn’t. The JCVI guidance allows for this level of flexibility and the lack of consistent application continues to cause anxiety and confusion for the learning disabled population and their families and carers. **The UKLDCNN believe that it would be an effective use of resource to vaccinate on a home based approach and include staff for that home at the same time. Further any multiple occupancy dwelling, such as supported living should be approached on this same basis**

The UKLDCNN recommend that broadening the description of the existing JCVI advice will be of benefit in reducing the confusion and prioritising the vulnerable. Many people with mild learning disabilities are known to mental health or learning disability services and prescribed psychotropic medications. This means they could fall into the serious mental illness category of group 6. **The UKLDCNN believe that it would be an inappropriate use of resource to focus on identifying those people with learning disabilities and serious mental illness when there could be a better use of resource to focus on vaccinating all people with learning disabilities instead**.

We have seen some examples of creative approaches to vaccinating people with learning disabilities who are unable to attend vaccination hubs, reasonable adjustments have been made for some people to be vaccinated in their own homes or at a place they feel more safe and comfortable and we know of some trusts in England that have made the decision to vaccinate everyone with a learning disability, using their discretion and the flexibility of the JCVI guidance to target those who are most likely to die.

Inviting all people with a learning disability for the vaccine would mean that there is no further delay addressing the significant health inequality. We acknowledge that this is likely to result in some inclusion of individuals outside the severe/profound learning disability group. There is already a system in place which has disadvantaged this group, an age based system automatically excludes people with learning disabilities who are well known to die earlier than the general population, often dying between the ages of 55 and 64. People with learning disabilities are dying from COVID 19 in greater numbers and at a younger age than the rest of the population. Implementing the vaccination guidance as it is currently set out is likely to inequitably discriminate, continuing to reinforce the status and inequality towards people with learning disabilities in our society today.

Making reasonable adjustments in line with the Equality Act (2010) in delivery of the vaccination program is essential to ensure effectiveness, efficiency and safety. **The UKLDCNN recommend that local health and social care decision makers take steps to adjust their vaccination programme to include all people with learning disability. This inclusivity would be a very positive step towards recognising the vulnerability and disproportionate inequality towards people with learning disabilities in health care.**

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