

## COVID-19 vaccination of autistic people

In March 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO), a United Nations agency in charge of coordinating international public health, classified the global spread of the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus type 2 (SARS-CoV-2) as a pandemic. This virus can lead to the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), a contagious condition affecting the human body differently with few severe case causing respiratory or multi organ failure. The pandemic triggered the development of several different COVID-19 vaccinations. By the end of 2020, priority groups in Europe began receiving vaccinations.

The first people to get vaccinated in many European countries were groups prioritized due to their fragile health. Unfortunately, people with disabilities were not considered a priority across Europe. As a result, several Disabled Persons' Organizations (DPOs) continue advocating for the EU and WHO to strongly recommend priority access to vaccination for persons with disabilities. This group is in greater danger of contracting COVID-19. Some have limited mobility and cannot avoid coming into close contact with others who may be infected, such as direct support service providers and family members. Others may have trouble understanding information, communicating symptoms of illness or practicing preventive measures, e.g. hand washing and distancing due to intellectual and learning disabilities.

Autistic people are people with disabilities, too. **Yet, people on the autism spectrum do not always have priority access to vaccination.** We deplore that institutions where autistic people are living have become hotbeds for COVID-19. Furthermore, there has been a lack of resources for accessibility of vaccinations. We understand vaccination scepticism as there can always be immunological reactions and side effects to any vaccination as well as varying degrees of effectiveness. Autism-Europe (AE) is aware of divergent opinions about vaccinations in general. The effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine is very high and the chances of experiencing side effects from scientifically proven vaccinations is very low.

Throughout the pandemic, a significant number of people have been infected. There have been cases requiring both short-term and long term-care, as a result of the severity of the disease, and thousands of lives have been lost. This is why it is important that everyone be vaccinated as soon as possible. Autistic people also require vaccination. However, certain adaptations are required in order to make vaccination available to people on the autism spectrum. **AE strongly demands prioritisation of autistic people and their families/carers/support persons,** accessible information about vaccination (facilities) and transparency about the vaccination process in order to tackle scepticism and misinformation.

People with intellectual and learning disabilities have been identified as a priority group in countries like France, Germany and the UK. Therefore, **AE calls the** WHO and EU to stress to all member states the need **to include autistic people and all people with disabilities in priority groups,** putting special emphasis on ageing adults, and autistic people with co-occurring conditions and other disabilities.