



INDIAN PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY

[Estd: 1948]

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Ref: IPS/HGS/20-22/0356 (MOH&FW)

Dated: January 11th, 2021

To,
Dr. Vinod K. Paul,
Hon'ble Member,
Niti Aayog & Chairman NEGVAC,
New Delhi.

Sub: Suggestion and request for inclusion of one more High Priority Group for Vaccination – Persons with Severe Mental Illnesses (SMIs).

Dear Dr Paul,

We are all proud of the manner in which the country is tackling the COVID-19 Pandemic, including the most recent initiative for Vaccination. It is also very appropriate that the phase-wise prioritisation of the vaccination includes some important groups with long term illnesses. We are writing to the National Expert Group on Vaccination (NEGVAC) to consider the priority needs of one more such group viz our Persons with Severe Mental Illnesses (SMIs) and their families.

The vulnerability of Persons with Severe Mental Illnesses (SMIs) to all forms of infection, including the COVID-19 virus infection, is well established. Many factors contribute to this vulnerability including the neglect of self-care, poor living conditions, compromised immune status, possibly inadequate COVID adherent behaviour amongst other factors. This high risk of SMIs is quite similar for those living in homes with families, as well as those living in Institutions-both mental hospitals/institutions as well as other residential institutions. The other group of SMIs with higher risk is also the Homeless SMIs on the streets and those residing in temporary shelters. All these groups of SMIs are also unlikely to be aware or cognisant of the symptom based neither risk based need for testing, nor are they likely be keen for proactive testing.



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Amongst the SMIs Schizophrenia, Bipolar Disorders, Paranoid Disorders etc are much at higher risk for COVID-19 infection.

As such, the priority Groups for Vaccination besides the other high risk groups should include Persons with Severe Mental Illnesses (SMIs), not only as a clinical & public policy consideration, but also as a Human Rights point of view. The protection of SMIs, through COVID Vaccination would be in line with the compassionate and considerate policy of the Govt. of India.

The Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS) the largest body of psychiatrists and mental health professionals in the country that has been serving the SMIs and their families for more than seven decades, would like to urge the NEGVAC to actively consider including SMIs as one of the Priority Groups. You will be happy to know that the IPS has been actively involved in the management of various aspects of mental health and public health issues for this pandemic. We are sure that the NEGVAC and the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of India, will consider this suggestion favourably and at the earliest.

Thanking you,

Sincerely yours,

(Prof. P.K. Dalal)
President
Indian Psychiatric Society

(Prof. T.S. Sathyanarayana Rao)
Hon. General Secretary
Indian Psychiatric Society