



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES
A Healthcare Service Agency

NED LAMONT
GOVERNOR

MIRIAM E. DELPHIN-RITTMON, Ph.D.
COMMISSIONER

MEMORANDUM

To: DMHAS Private Non-Profit Providers
From: Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D.
Date: January 21, 2021
Subject: DMHAS COVID-19 Provider Update #23

Connecticut continues to see escalations in COVID-cases as we begin to see increases related to the Christmas and New Year's Holidays. While case numbers and positive testing rates are fluctuating, it is expected that cases may continue to grow in response to the holidays and the appearance of new variants of the virus that may be more contagious. These trends demand that we increase our efforts to use all public health measures to control the spread of the virus. At the same time, we are moving into a new phase of vaccination that may have implications for private-not-for-profit staff and their clients. The State of Connecticut has recently moved into a new phase of vaccination, beginning to vaccinate those individuals who fall into what is described as Phase 1b. While information is somewhat limited, I wanted to use this Provider Update to share what we know about this new phase and to pass along other resources that may be of use to you. Thank you for all you are doing to contain the spread of COVID-19.

Vaccination for Agency Staff and PNP Clients

DMHAS providers fall into more than one category as it relates to vaccination of staff. Some of our providers registered in November to become vaccinators (e.g. FQHCs) and have vaccinated their staff <https://portal.ct.gov/DPH/Immunizations/COVID-19-Vaccine-Providers>.

Many employers of direct service staff registered their staff for appointments in DPH's VAMs system in 1.a and/or have partnered with local FQHC/hospital vaccinators.

As I indicated above, the state has moved into a new phase of the state's vaccination plan. That phase is called 1.b and includes essential workers and staff and individuals living in congregate group settings (e.g. SUD/MH residential, group homes). Information about this phase and who is included can be found at the following link: <https://portal.ct.gov/Coronavirus/COVID-19-Vaccination---Phases> and registration of employees in 1b can be found at <https://dphsubmissions.ct.gov/EmployerEnrollment>. The DPH website does indicate that appointments are currently limited. Please note that DPH is still working on operationalizing phase 1b while continuing to offer vaccinations to individuals in 1a (first and second doses). The current focus of 1b is on offering the vaccine to individuals 75 and older. If you are serving

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<https://portal.ct.gov/dmhas>

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these individuals you may assist them with scheduling an appointment for vaccination <https://portal.ct.gov/Coronavirus/COVID-19-Vaccination---75-and-older>.

We are asking providers to check the DPH website daily to ensure that you have the most up to date information.

PPE and Oximeters

DMHAS has been notified that oximeters are being made available to our providers. Pulse oximeters are devices that allow you to take your pulse and oxygen level at home. Pulse oximeters can be used to more quickly identify COVID patients who are experiencing respiratory problems and link them to treatment before symptoms worsen. If you believe your agency would be able to utilize additional oximeters in your residential programs or with clients in the community, we are asking that you request these through the same process we have been using for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) needs. Requests for oximeters should be e-mailed to lauren.simbab@ct.gov

Expanded Access to Treatment for Opioid Users

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has recently announced changes that are increasing access to treatment for opioid users. These changes waive certain requirements for DEA registered physicians. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is announcing it will publish [*Practice Guidelines for the Administration of Buprenorphine for Treating Opioid Use Disorder*](#), to expand access to medication-assisted treatment (MAT) by exempting physicians from certain certification requirements needed to prescribe buprenorphine for opioid use disorder (OUD) treatment. The exemption only applies to physicians treating patients located in the state where they are authorized to practice and is limited to treating no more than thirty (30) patients. The exemption applies only to the prescription of drugs or formulations covered under the X-waiver of the CSA, such as buprenorphine, and does not apply to the prescription, dispensation, or use of methadone for the treatment of OUD.

COVID-19 Outbreak Response in Non-Medical Congregate Settings

Health and Human Services agencies in Connecticut recently issued a guidance for the management of a COVID-19 outbreak in non-medical congregate settings. The guidance compiles in a singular document information regarding the management of a COVID-19 outbreak. You may have received much of this information over the past 10 months but this guidance consolidates the info into one document. That document can be found at the following link on the DMHAS website: <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DMHAS/COVID-19/Resources/Provider-Guide---Outbreak-Response---Non-Medical-Congregate---11321.pdf>

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) COVID-19 Vaccination Communications Toolkit

The CDC has developed a communication toolkit which can be used to help build confidence about the vaccine among staff and clients you serve. The Toolkit includes a comprehensive array of communication materials that educate staff about the vaccine and provide them with tools to educate patients and answer questions they may have about the vaccine. The Communications Toolkit can be found at the following link:

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/health-systems-communication-toolkit.html#posters>

You and your staff continue to greatly support our efforts to manage the virus. It is clear that we are now moving into a new phase of our management of this disease as the state expands access to the vaccine. At the same time, we continue to face the challenges associated with rises in cases due to post-holiday increases and increases related to new variants of the virus. We must redouble our efforts to maintain those practices that serve to contain the virus. I want to thank you again for all that you have done and ask that you remain vigilant so we can continue to manage the pandemic. As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to me at Miriam.Delphin-Rittmon@ct.gov or Deputy Commissioner Nancy Navarretta via email at Nancy.Navarretta@ct.gov