A Letter to the Feds

The leaders of AIDS United, The AIDS Institute, NASTAD, NCSD and NMAC seek answers on the impact of COVID-19 on people living with HIV.

July 19, 2021 By Paul Kawata

The Hon. Xavier Becerra
Secretary of Health and Human Services
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dr. Rochelle Walensky
Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Rd.
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dr. Anthony Fauci
Director, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
National Institutes of Health
5601 Fishers Lane, MSC 9806
Bethesda, MD 2089

Dr. Rachel Levine
Assistant Secretary for Health
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 2020

Harold Phillips
Director, Office of National AIDS Policy
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW Washington, DC 20502

The Hon. Xavier Becerra
Secretary of Health and Human Services
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dr. Rachel Levine
Assistant Secretary for Health
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 2020

Dr. Rochelle Walensky
Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Rd.
Atlanta, GA 30329

Harold Phillips
Director, Office of National AIDS Policy
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW Washington, DC 20502

Dr. Anthony Fauci
Director, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
National Institutes of Health
5601 Fishers Lane, MSC 9806
Bethesda, MD 2089

The Partnership to End the HIV, STDs, and Hepatitis Epidemics, a coalition of five of the nation's leading organizations fighting to end the HIV, STD, and viral hepatitis epidemics in the United States, write to express our grave concerns regarding the impact of COVID-19 on people living with HIV. We ask that you work quickly with the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices to determine and publish recommendations on the need for a third COVID-19 vaccine dose for people living with HIV. We ask further that your recommendations clearly address the impact of viral suppression status for people living with HIV as it relates to COVID-19. Additionally, we ask that your agencies work with health departments, community-based organizations, and other vaccination programs to prioritize vaccine outreach to people living with HIV who may not currently be fully vaccinated.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have understood that people living with HIV may face unique challenges based on their immunocompromised status. Recently released data from the World Health Organization (WHO) suggests that people living with HIV who contract COVID-19 are more likely to face severe illness and mortality as a result of COVID-19. The study estimated that HIV increases a person's chances of dying from COVID-19 by 30 percent, and one in four people living with HIV who are hospitalized for COVID-19 may die. Certain populations are even more impacted, as they found that half of men living with HIV over 65 who were hospitalized for COVID-19 may die.

These new data are very much a concern for the people living with HIV, especially with recent increases in COVID-19 cases spurred by the Delta variant, the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, and continued vaccine hesitancy. The CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices will meet on July 22nd, and we ask that the WHO's study be considered when determining if people living with HIV, in addition to others who are immunocompromised, need an additional COVID-19 dose. Because of the urgency of this situation, we hope that a determination can be quickly made so that people living with HIV can make decisions on how to best protect themselves from COVID-19.

Additionally, we ask that the WHO's data be incorporated into all further vaccine outreach to people living with HIV. These data make clear that vaccinations for this population must be prioritized, and that it is of utmost importance that vaccination programs, health departments, and

HIV treatment providers work to ensure that their patients are vaccinated. The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 and HIV on people of color, coupled with historic medical mistrust within these communities, requires outreach that is catered to the unique concerns within the HIV community. Our organizations can provide guidance and partnership as you do this work. We will continue to emphasize that people living with HIV must take additional steps to stay healthy, and that starts with getting vaccinated.

We thank each of you for your continued leadership in our fight against COVID-19, HIV, STDs and hepatitis. Our Partnership would welcome a chance to meet with you and your staff to further discuss this issue, as well as our nation's response to these infectious disease syndemics. Thank you for considering this urgent request, and please feel free to use us as a resource in the future.

Jesse Milan, Jr.
President and CEO
AIDS United

David Harvey
Executive Director
National Coalition of STD Directors (NCSD)

Michael Ruppal
Executive Director
The AIDS Institute

Paul Kawata
Executive Director
NMAC

Stephen Lee
Executive Director
NASTAD

Jesse Milan, Jr.
President and CEO
AIDS United

David Harvey
Executive Director
National Coalition of STD Directors (NCSD)

Michael Ruppal
Executive Director
The AIDS Institute

Paul Kawata
Executive Director
NMAC

Stephen Lee
Executive Director
NASTAD

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.