

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities disproportionately affected by COVID-19

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The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a disproportionate toll on people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs), write the

directors of the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Centers (IDDRC) Network, a nationwide group funded by NIH's Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. The article was written by John Constantino, M.D., director of the IDDDRC at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, along with fellow IDDDRC directors and leaders of the Association of University Centers on Disabilities. It appears in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*.

A large number of people with IDD who require in-person care have lost the support of trained caregivers and community service providers due to the pandemic. The authors note that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and others have issued guidelines for group homes, schools, and others entrusted with the care of people with IDD. It is vital to ensure that when they return to work, care staff exercise techniques and procedures to protect their clients from infection, the authors write. Moreover, people with IDD depend on caregivers and loved ones to help them bridge gaps in intellectual and communication abilities. In the absence of this human contact, the authors call for virtual care and support, where viable. Those who cannot benefit from screen-based supports should be prioritized to receive in-person services.

Suspension of classroom time also disproportionately affects children with IDD, who often require special educational services, increased teacher-student ratios, and specialized interventions, many of which need to be administered in person, the authors note. It is difficult for families to take on these tasks, and qualified in-home surrogates should be mobilized whenever possible to meet this need and to support parents' efforts.

Also, people with IDD often cannot verbalize their symptoms during telemedicine appointments, and physicians need to use their best judgment in providing in-person care for them when necessary,

according to the authors. The article emphasizes that people with IDD who are infected with COVID-19 should receive equal access to testing and appropriate medical care.

More information: John N. Constantino et al. The Impact of COVID-19 on Individuals With Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: Clinical and Scientific Priorities, *American Journal of Psychiatry* (2020). [DOI: 10.1176/appi.ajp.2020.20060780](https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2020.20060780)

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