

**Save Lives by Prioritizing Individuals with Schizophrenia
for COVID-19 Outreach and Education**

New Research on Schizophrenia and COVID-19

- In a cohort of people with COVID-19, a Schizophrenia-spectrum diagnosis was associated with more than double the odds of dying, according to new research published in the Journal of the American Medical Association.¹ **In this study, a diagnosis of Schizophrenia ranked behind only age in how strongly it was associated with COVID-19 mortality.**
- This was a well-designed cohort study of 7,348 adults with laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 in an academic health system in New York State.

Background

- Decades of research established that people with Schizophrenia-spectrum disorders are at higher risk of health problems like heart disease, diabetes, and cancer; moreover, they die up to 25 years earlier than the general public.
- This well-known problem has been called “a scandal of premature mortality.”²
- Evidence from earlier vaccination efforts shows difficulty reaching people with Schizophrenia.³ Unlike other vulnerable groups, flu vaccine rates among people with Schizophrenia-spectrum disorders are as low as 25%.⁴

We can save lives by ensuring that Michiganders living with Schizophrenia know how to protect themselves from COVID-19, and access vaccines as soon as possible.

Barriers and Potential Solutions

Barrier: *Systems level* barriers may include low access to healthcare.

Solution: Offer education, outreach, and vaccine clinics in locations where people with Schizophrenia feel comfortable, such as Clubhouses⁵, Drop-In Centers⁶, and Community Mental Health Centers. Collaborate with organizations such as the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI)⁷ to make the public aware of the higher risk of COVID-19 mortality among people with Schizophrenia.

Barrier: *Individual level* barriers may include suspiciousness of the vaccine, low health literacy, or lack of motivation to engage in preventive self-care.

Solution: Provide the behavioral health workforce – including psychiatrists, social workers, nurses, Peer Support Specialists, and Community Health Workers – with education on the link between Schizophrenia and COVID-19 mortality. Tailor educational brochures on COVID-19 risk for people with Schizophrenia, to raise awareness of their increased risk using clear and simple language, and provide these to the behavioral health workforce for distribution.

Please see reverse side for resources and references. Feel free to contact us with questions.

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Key Resources and References

1. Nemani, K., Li, C., Olfson, M., Blessing, E. M., Razavian, N., Chen, J., ... & Goff, D. C. (2021). Association of psychiatric disorders with mortality among patients with COVID-19. *JAMA psychiatry*. For access visit <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2775179>
2. Thornicroft, G. (2011). Physical health disparities and mental illness: the scandal of premature mortality. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 199(6), 441-442. For access visit <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22130744/>
3. Warren, N., Kisely, S., & Siskind, D. (2020). Maximizing the uptake of a COVID-19 vaccine in people with severe mental illness: a public health priority. *JAMA psychiatry*. For access visit <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2774106>
4. Miles, LW, Williams, N, Luthy, KE, Eden, L. Adult vaccination rates in the mentally ill population: an outpatient improvement project. *J Am Psychiatr Nurses Assoc*. 2020;26(2):172-180. For access visit <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1078390319831763>
5. For information on Michigan-based Clubhouses, see <https://www.mi-clubhouse.org/>
6. For information on Michigan-based Drop-In Centers, see https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71550_2941_4871_48558-203842--,00.html
7. For information on Michigan's NAMI chapter, see <https://namimi.org/>