



MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL SOCIETY

Every physician matters, each patient counts.

March 19, 2021

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The Honorable Marylou Sudders
Secretary Health and Human Services
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
One Ashburton Place
Boston, MA 02108

Dear Secretary Sudders:

The recent announcement regarding the expected increase in vaccine supply and the expansion of the Commonwealth's vaccination eligibility schedule is an encouraging step forward in our fight against COVID-19. While we appreciate the administration's efforts to prioritize individuals and communities at highest risk for morbidity and mortality from COVID-19, troubling racial and ethnic disparities in COVID vaccination rates persist and must be addressed. As new opportunities arise with increased vaccine supply, the Medical Society remains committed to working with the administration and building upon existing distribution efforts to improve equitable access and reduce racial and ethnic disparities in vaccination rates.

Mass vaccination sites have increased overall accessibility to vaccines and have been efficient at getting shots in arms en masse, but as we continue to see disparities in vaccination rates, we urge the state to continue pursuing additional avenues for low-barrier vaccination. While we applaud the recent allocation of funding to improve vaccine trust and acceptance in the state's most disproportionately impacted communities, inequities in accessing the COVID vaccine are not only the result of vaccine mistrust and hesitancy but also a consequence of structural barriers in access to health care. Physicians can help address these structural barriers by enhancing distribution efforts and improving equitable access to vaccines among Black, Latinx, immigrant, low-income, and hard-to-reach populations.

Patients should be able to access health care where they live and work. Physicians are trusted sources of medical information and, with community-based practices across the Commonwealth, they offer a convenient, familiar, and accessible setting for vaccination. Currently, the foremost limiting factor in achieving herd immunity is the amount of vaccine available. As vaccine supply is increased, the primary limiting factors become structural barriers to access of available vaccines and individuals' willingness to be vaccinated. Physicians are well positioned to improve vaccine distribution and are ready to help patients overcome those barriers in order to get us over the finish line. It is critical to now begin identifying ways to operationalize how physician practices will administer COVID vaccines.

Alongside equitable vaccine distribution, our public health recovery also depends on a reopening approach in which the state remains hypervigilant regarding emerging data that may indicate upward trends of infection associated with eased restrictions or an evolving virus. While we are encouraged by the current data, we know that new variants pose a

threat. At each juncture we must allow sufficient time for analysis of data and trends before moving to the next step of reopening, and we should only move forward when reliable data confirm sustained improvement in health trends.

Along those lines, we commend the Commonwealth's commitment to safely reopening schools in Massachusetts. In-person learning is vital to children's health and development. As we aim for a return to in-person learning, the health of children, and all school employees, remains paramount. We must take caution in reopening society at large in the safest and most equitable way so that we may prioritize the restoration of normalcy for our children.

The Massachusetts Medical Society is eager to collaborate with the state to advance equitable vaccination and reopening efforts. Physicians can help unlock barriers that impede many residents of our Commonwealth from obtaining the COVID vaccine, which will be key to protecting the health of our patients and the public.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Rosman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David A. Rosman, MD, MBA