Empowering People: Providers Shaping Policies

Reopening Day Programs During COVID-19

Modify the guidelines for reopening Day Programs in the State of New Jersey

During CY 2020, the NJ Department of Health adopted a method of calculating risk of COVID spread across six regions. In order to prevent for the exposure and spread of COVID among individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the COVID-19 Activity Level Index (CALI) is calculated weekly and for 46 weeks has continued to be utilized by the NJ Department of Human Services to determine opening and closure of day programs. Specifically, when a region’s hazard assessment is “High” then the day program must be closed and when it is “Moderate” then the day program may open.

Despite the abundance of information, expertise (acquired mainly due to and during the 2-months in the fall of 2020 when day programs were permitted to be open), equipment, and, since January 15, 2021, access to the COVID 19 vaccine by many people with IDD, the current standard fails to account for and, instead, overlooks these details. Because the metrics have not evolved, risk in day programs is overstated and individual and family rights to self-determination are undermined. It is imperative that guidelines account for the current reality of actually opening and closing our day programs and it is for these reasons we propose for consideration the following additions as determinants during the public health emergency.

Additional Reopening Guidelines.

1. Certified DD Day Program located in a region in which the COVID 19 Activity Level Index is “High” shall be permitted to open their program at capacity for all participants who have provided proof of full vaccination for COVID 19. People are considered fully vaccinated for COVID 19, 2 weeks after they have received the second dose in a 2-dose series (Pfizer-BioNtech or Moderna) or 2 weeks after they have received a single-dose vaccine (Johnson and Johnson (J&J)/Jansen) and provided that they can maintain physical distancing of not less than 6-feet. (1)
2. Certified DD Day Programs located in a region in which the COVID 19 Activity Level Index was “Moderate” shall be permitted to operate their programs as “Moderate” for all individuals receiving services regardless of vaccination status unless and until there COVID 19 Activity Level Index has been “High” for 3 consecutive weeks. Following this 3-week period and commencing on the Monday following such an event; all individuals receiving services who are not fully vaccinated shall return to the care of their home provider. Said Service Recipients will receive notice from the Day Program Provider that they may return to in-person day program services the Monday following a published CALI report indicating that the region in which the day program operates has returned to “Moderate” status.

(1) This recommendation is consistent with the Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People, provided by the CDC, March 8, 2021 update.