AAPD Admonishes Proposed Changes to CDC COVID Isolation Guidance

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Contact: Jess Davidson at jdavidson@aapd.com; 202-975-0960

WASHINGTON, DC – On February 13, 2024, the Washington Post reported that the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is preparing to release new proposed isolation guidance for COVID-19 that would reduce isolation times to as little as one day in many cases. The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) is incredibly alarmed by the CDC's reported plan and strongly urges the Biden Administration and CDC to reconsider before they enact devastating policies that will harm and kill countless disabled Americans.

While the CDC makes plans to dismantle any remaining shred of meaningful public health guidance, the current picture of COVID-19 in the U.S. is astonishingly bad. Keep in mind when reading the below statistics, that official mortality counts likely underestimate the true number of people who have died from COVID.

- This news comes on the heels of a massive early-2024 COVID surge, the United States' second-highest COVID surge since the pandemic began
- The United States experienced more than 1,500 COVID deaths per week in the month of January 2024
- Last week alone, more than 21,000 Americans were hospitalized with COVID-19
- At least 5-10% of all people who contract COVID-19 are estimated to develop Long COVID, a disability that has affected at least 18 million Americans

The Washington Post's reporting revealed that, according to three agency officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity, proposed guidelines to be released for public feedback in April would change isolation guidelines to recommend that people would no longer need to stay home if they have been fever-free for at least 24 hours without the aid of medication and their symptoms are mild and improving.

"These proposed guidelines would put people with disabilities and others who are at increased risk for serious illness from COVID-19 in more grave and unnecessary danger, beyond what they have already endured throughout four years of the pandemic," said **Maria Town, AAPD President and CEO**. "High-risk and disabled people are all of our coworkers, classmates, and neighbors. Their lives are worthy. And their safety and care should be centered."

Town continued, "Changing COVID isolation times does not change how the virus behaves. Instead, it ignores the reality of this virus and the risk of spread in so-called "mild" or "symptom-free" cases. Mild COVID is still COVID. A person who has COVID without a fever still has COVID. And that means they are still posing a risk to the high-risk, immunocompromised, and disabled members of their community."

"The solution for economic and labor market repercussions of 5-day isolation periods for COVID is for federal, state, and local governments to mandate employers provide paid sick and family leave for those who have COVID-19, or who are caring for a loved-one who has COVID-19. The answer is not to reduce isolation times and expose others to infection," **said Town.**

Since March of 2020, when COVID-19 was officially declared a pandemic, disabled people knew that they would be among those most heavily impacted by the virus, not only because of health related vulnerabilities, but because of ableism imbedded in our society, our policies, and in the field of public health. AAPD has been heavily involved in efforts to fight for more comprehensive policies and resources to prevent unmitigated spread of COVID-19. These efforts continue to this day since the pandemic is not over.

Alongside other disability rights and Long COVID advocacy organizations, AAPD has engaged with the Biden-Harris administration and federal agencies numerous times to stress the importance of preventative COVID-19 measures and resources for people with COVID and patients who develop Long COVID. AAPD has advocated for equitable vaccine distribution, accessible vaccine delivery, investments in home and community based services, COVID-safe voting options, the continued use of remote work and education, and more. The disability community has also continuously advocated for decision-makers and healthcare providers to not disregard disabled individuals during the Medicaid unwinding process so that they don't lose their healthcare coverage.

In addition to organizational efforts to address these policies at a federal level, countless disabled people fight every day for their safety and the safety of their communities by organizing in response to COVID policies of individual entities such as employers, healthcare facilities, and schools and postsecondary education settings. Even if they are not federally mandated to, many institutions of all kinds are likely to follow the CDC's guidelines and reduce their own isolation timelines for their institutions, which will leave the high-risk members of their communities in an unsafe position.

Ms. Town concluded, "President Biden considers himself a champion of disabled Americans, as he has shared at many disability policy focused convenings. Mr. President, if you want to be an advocate for our community, then I implore you to listen to us and change course. Disabled Americans want and need members of their communities who contract COVID to isolate, until their risk of spreading COVID decreases."

If the CDC publishes guidelines similar to those reported, AAPD will encourage people with disabilities and our allies to mobilize and submit comments discouraging the CDC from making this change.

Resources

Learn About AAPD's COVID-19 & Higher Education Program

Read AAPD's Statements and Previous COVID Advocacy

- AAPD Calls for Resources and Protection Following End of COVID-19 Public Health Emergency – May 2023
- AAPD's Statement on the End of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency – April 2023
- Advocates Release Sign On Statement: Mask Mandates on Public Transit – April 2022
- Following Meeting with Dr. Rochelle Walensky, Disability Rights Advocates Release Statement and Readout – January 2021
- Disability Rights Advocates to Meet with CDC Director Following GMA Appearance; Nearly 150 Disability Organizations Release Policy Demand Letter Ahead of Meeting – January 2021

Read AAPD's Report on COVID-19 and the Disability Vote

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