



January 13, 2021

The Honorable Andrew Cuomo  
Chairman, National Governors Association  
444 North Capitol Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20001

The Honorable Asa Hutchinson  
Vice-Chairman, National Governors Association  
444 North Capitol Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Chairman Cuomo and Vice-Chairman Hutchinson:

I write today to urge the National Governors Association and state and local governments to prioritize for COVID-19 vaccine access those individuals with kidney failure, also known as end-stage renal disease (ESRD), who are currently on dialysis or who have had a kidney transplant. Vaccine distribution action plans are now being refined and amended, and one of the most vulnerable populations – ESRD patients -- who were not originally included in the highest priority category should now be placed at the top of the priority list.

The American Kidney Fund (AKF) fights kidney disease on all fronts as the nation's leading kidney nonprofit. AKF works on behalf of the 37 million Americans living with kidney disease, and the millions more at risk, with an unmatched scope of programs that support people wherever they are in their fight against kidney disease—from prevention through transplant. Through programs of prevention, early detection, financial support, disease management, clinical research, innovation and advocacy, no kidney organization impacts more lives than AKF. AKF is one of the nation's top-rated nonprofits, investing 97 cents of every donated dollar in programs, and holds the highest 4-Star rating from Charity Navigator and the Platinum Seal of Transparency from GuideStar.

Prioritizing vaccinations for people with ESRD would help ensure that these patients are protected from COVID-19. Dialysis patients are in a uniquely vulnerable position. In order to survive, most ESRD patients on hemodialysis must travel to dialysis centers three days every week for several hours at a time to receive treatment. Staying home is not an option for them, and every time they leave their homes they are risking exposure to COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lists chronic kidney disease as an underlying medical condition that increases the risk of severe illness due to COVID-19.<sup>i</sup>

Data have also shown that ESRD patients have a higher likelihood of infection and hospitalization from COVID-19. Among Medicare beneficiaries, ESRD patients have an infection rate nearly four times higher and a COVID-19 hospitalization rate seven times higher than the general Medicare

population.<sup>ii</sup> A study reported in the journal *Anaesthesia* showed that those with chronic kidney disease have a greater chance of in-hospital mortality.<sup>iii</sup>

COVID-19 and kidney failure both disproportionately impact communities of color.<sup>iv</sup> The Black population has a COVID-19 fatality rate of 132 per 100,000, and the Hispanic fatality rate is 102 per 100,000; the non-Hispanic white population has a death rate of 81 per 100,000.<sup>v</sup> Kidney failure also has a much greater burden on minority populations. Black people comprise 13 percent of the US population, but account for 35 percent of people on dialysis. Hispanics are 1.3 times more likely to be diagnosed with kidney failure compared to non-Hispanic populations.<sup>vi</sup>

When initial vaccine distribution plans were created, there were concerns about the safety and efficacy of these vaccines on people with chronic kidney disease, on dialysis or with a transplant. However, the American Society of Nephrology (ASN) and the American Society of Transplantation (AST) have now both recommended vaccinations for dialysis patients and organ transplant recipients, respectively. With those statements, elected officials can now move forward with the support -- and the science to back it up -- provided by the medical leaders and specialists.

AKF is ready to work with state and local governments to help raise public awareness about the vaccine to ESRD patients – those on dialysis and those with a kidney transplant. I look forward to collaborating with you and your fellow governors on these important issues.

Sincerely,



LaVarne A. Burton  
President and CEO

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html#chronic-kidney-disease>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/medicare-covid-19-data-snapshot-fact-sheet.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://associationofanaesthetists-publications.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/anae.15293>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://covidtracking.com/race/dashboard>

<sup>v</sup> <https://covidtracking.com/race>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/kidney-disease/race-ethnicity#:~:text=African%20Americans%20are%20almost%20four,failure%20in%20the%20United%20States.>