

Research Summary

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Impact of COVID-19: Considerations for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities Across Major Life Domains

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Sheppard-Jones, K., Avellone, L., Wehman, P., Rumrill, P., & Seward, H. (in press, 2021) Impact of COVID-19: Considerations for individuals with developmental disabilities across major life domains. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*.

■ A QUICK LOOK:

COVID-19 has largely impacted the lives of people all around the world leaving some more vulnerable than others to negative outcomes. One such group is those with developmental disabilities (DD), who may be disproportionately affected across many different areas of life including health, work, and education. This article discusses specific and unique problems that individuals with DD may face during a national health crisis. These include the potential for inequitable treatment in healthcare, difficulty receiving employment supports, and challenges in accessing educational curriculum. Strategies for addressing these concerns are discussed.

■ KEY FINDINGS:

Healthcare:

- Individuals with DD often have secondary health conditions due to a variety of reasons (e.g., sedentary lifestyles, infrequent health visits, financial barriers to adequate healthcare, etc.) that make them more susceptible to experiencing a serious outcome from COVID-19.
- Individuals with DD are often reliant on caregivers and support staff for daily needs which limits their ability to quarantine and thus increases chances of exposure to pandemic illnesses.
- Individuals with DD may have challenges in communication that make it difficult for them to accurately report symptoms in a timely manner which can affect efficacy of healthcare treatment.

Employment:

- Individuals with DD are likely to work entry level positions (e.g., retail and restaurant jobs) which were among the first to shut down during the pandemic resulting in substantial income loss for individuals with DD.
- Individuals with DD in jobs that remained opened (e.g., grocery stores, pharmacies, etc.) or that enabled telework options were likely to need additional training and support in adjusting to new health safety measures on-the-job or building remote work skills. If employment support agencies are unable to assist or employers do not have the capacity to provide additional training, job security can be threatened.

Education:

- Many individuals with DD may require learning strategies such as hand-over-hand prompting for various skills that do not easily translate to a virtual teaching environment, which can cause educational challenges for students.

■ PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE:

These challenges were certainly sudden and unexpected, and various stakeholders (e.g., healthcare workers, businesses, employment support providers, educators) are no doubt working hard to provide quality services. The purpose of this paper is to spread awareness concerns and highlight the vulnerability of individuals with DD during a pandemic as the first step toward prevention. The second step is inciting action on the part of stakeholders large and small.

■ MORE ABOUT THIS ARTICLE

Making sure that individuals with DD receive equitable services during a pandemic is the responsibility of many stakeholders, and there are many actionable steps that can be taken to accomplish this goal. For more information on specific support strategies that can be used for individuals with DD in different settings, please review Table 1 in the full article.

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