

Abby Schirmacher
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JRNL 4602

Another Story About Inequity. This Time, It's COVID-19 Vaccinations.

Imagine you're a janitor at the local school and you're finishing another long night of cleaning. Your job wasn't easy pre-COVID-19, but now you also face the extra duty of disinfecting surfaces. You return home to remove the mask and gloves plastered to your skin and awake the next morning to do it all over again. All with no hope of getting that precious vaccination anytime soon.

This situation is the reality for many workers in Colorado today. While the state hurries to vaccinate the elderly, health care workers, and more as vaccination rollout expands to Phase 1B, marginalized groups are left behind. The janitors, laborers, and service or factory workers that interact with the most people on a daily basis are not prioritized when it comes to the vaccine. Why?

The inequitable disparities in this country on the basis of race and income are presenting themselves yet again. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "there is increasing evidence that some racial and ethnic minority groups are being disproportionately affected by COVID-19." Yet those groups are not being vaccinated at comparable rates to wealthy, whites currently swarming vaccination centers.

The bottom line is that marginalized groups need to be vaccinated more equitably. And it's our responsibility as fellow community members to make sure that happens. We're all growing tired of this virus and its disastrous effects on life. For almost a year now, we've altered our lives extensively to accommodate the coronavirus. Every conversation, every time we leave the house, every slight sore throat that's probably from talking over Zoom for hours on end, reminds us of the misery this virus has caused. We're not just tired, we're exhausted.

However, most of us are privileged to be at home and sitting on Zoom. We forget to think about those who continue to work every day in unsafe conditions. A mask can only do so much because ultimately a mask is not a vaccine. Those workers deserve that vaccine.

Several solutions to disproportionate vaccine distribution are surfacing nationwide. Counties in North Carolina and Washington D.C. are prioritizing ZIP codes proven more prone to the virus when it comes to scheduling vaccination appointments. Unexpectedly, members of these communities are hesitating to register. It is clear that solutions are arising and while the effects aren't ideal, it is vital that state governments continue to prioritize these groups in rolling out the vaccine.

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The ideal approach is two-fold. First and foremost, proper accessibility to register to receive the vaccination is crucial. Both the school janitor and an elderly citizen may not have the means to scroll through the internet trying to pinpoint the correct facility, to then fill out a form that just puts them on a waiting list.

Mainly, we must prioritize those at the most risk of contracting the virus. The first step in getting this pandemic under control is addressing these communities. Low-income and minority groups deserve to gain access to this vaccine. The solutions in place are a starting point to encourage members of these groups to leave their nearest clinic with that vaccination card in hand. Our communities depend on it. That janitor's life depends on it.