

# COVID-19 Vaccination for Undocumented Individuals

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## BACKGROUND

- The National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine has recommended that “all individuals in the United States and its territories should receive the vaccine...irrespective of their legal status;” however, vaccination plans for undocumented individuals currently vary by state.
- The Center for Migration Studies estimates that 5.5 million undocumented immigrants work in “essential critical infrastructure” categories. These workers meet the health, infrastructure, manufacturing, service, food, safety, and other needs of all Americans.
  - This represents approximately half of the estimated 10.5-12 million undocumented immigrants living in the US.
  - Up to 15% of essential workers in any given state are undocumented.
- Over 50,000 immigrants, asylum seekers, and undocumented individuals are held in detention by US authorities at any given time, often in unsafe conditions.

## PIH PHAU RECOMMENDATIONS

- **All undocumented individuals should be vaccinated based on their risk and exposure profiles – e.g. consider priority for vaccination irrespective of citizenship status.**
- **All detained individuals should be vaccinated in the congregate group 1b, as many states have already planned. Barring inclusion in phase 1b, detained individuals should be prioritized for subsequent phases.**

## PUBLIC HEALTH JUSTIFICATION

- Undocumented immigrants should be considered both high-risk and high-exposure due to a combination of socioeconomic factors:
  - High-risk:**
    - Limited access to health care for numerous reasons, from fear of legal system to lack of knowledge and language barriers; also, more likely to be under- or uninsured.
    - Poverty also increases the prevalence of comorbidities that increase the likelihood of severe COVID-19 and mortality.
  - High-exposure:**
    - Many undocumented immigrants work in essential sectors such as food processing, transportation, farming, and meatpacking. These industries have seen significant outbreaks throughout the pandemic, partially driven by poor working conditions and exploitation of workers (crowding, lack of PPE, etc.).
    - Undocumented populations are more likely to be lower income, meaning crowded and multi-generational housing and use of public transit is more likely, increasing infection risks.
- Given the large proportion of undocumented essential workers, reaching the vaccination threshold required for herd immunity will be difficult without vaccinating undocumented workers.
- The risk is even higher for undocumented individuals in detention facilities, given these environments are characterized by close quarters, frequent transferring across facilities, and poor access to sanitation and

hygiene.

- The monthly case rate within detention facilities was estimated to be 13.4 times higher than that of the US general population.

## SOURCES:

1. <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20210106.483626/full/>
2. [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/supporting\\_resources/justice\\_free\\_zones\\_immigrant\\_detention.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/supporting_resources/justice_free_zones_immigrant_detention.pdf)
3. <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/health-coverage-and-care-of-undocumented-immigrants/>
4. <https://cmsny.org/publications/us-essential-workers/>
5. <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20210106.483626/full/>