



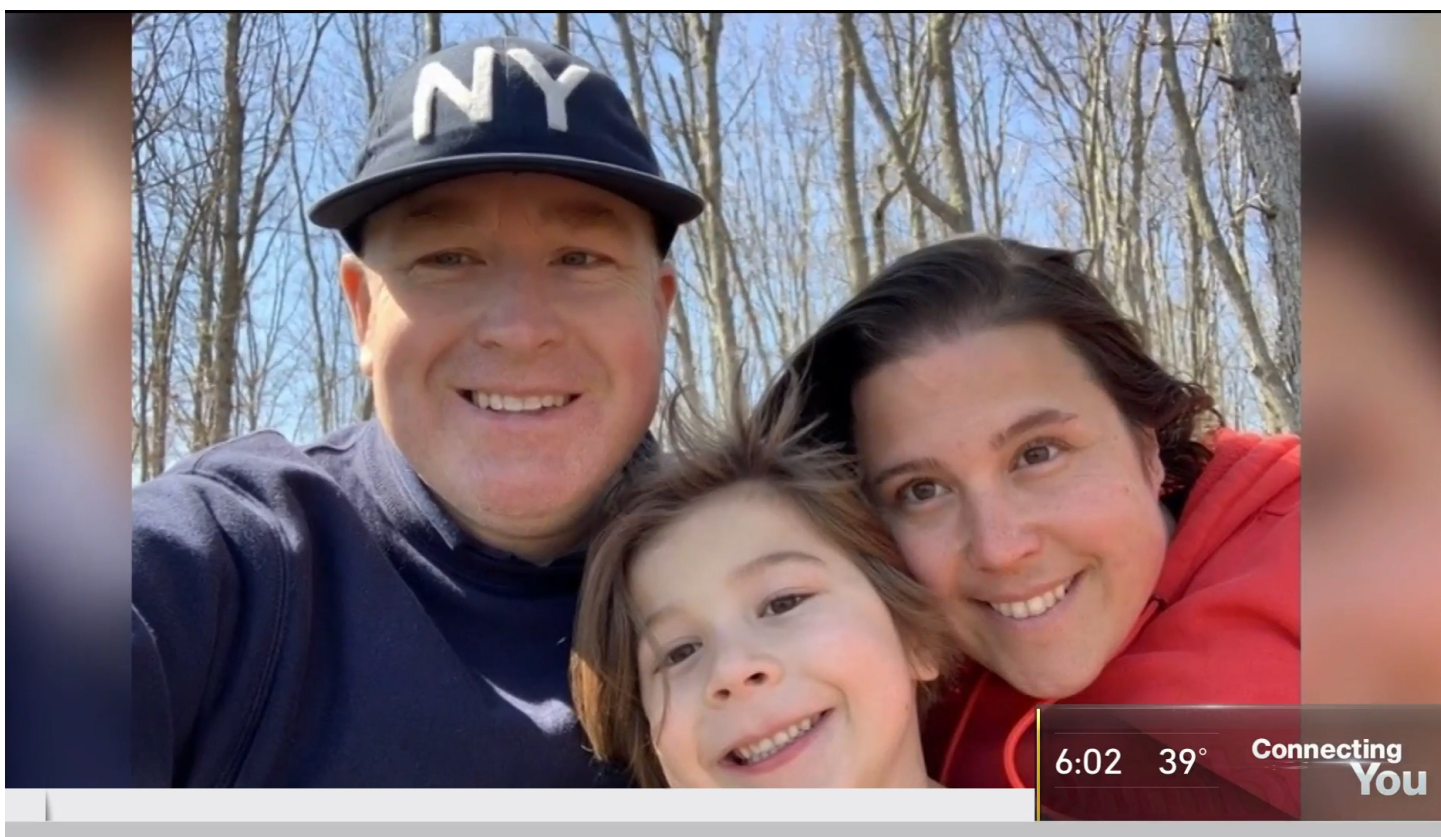
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CORONAVIRUS VACCINE

State's Age-Based Vaccine Plan Faces Civil Rights Challenge

Connecticut's age-based vaccine rollout was meant keeping things fair, but for people with life-threatening conditions, it feels anything but.

By **Kristen Johnson** • Published February 25, 2021 • Updated on February 26, 2021 at 11:42 am



A disability rights group has filed a civil complaint over Gov. Lamont's decision to change to an age-based COVID-19 vaccination plan.

"My birthday's Monday. I'm turning 39," said Amanda Robinson of Madison.

What Robinson wants most for her birthday is the COVID-19 vaccine.

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"I'm going to appointments like every day, I'm out being exposed," she explained.

Diagnosed with breast cancer, she started chemotherapy last Thursday and needs the vaccine before her immune system gets too weak.

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"Her doctors were like, 'Yes you can get a vaccine now we're not sure about a month from now,'" explained her husband Nick.

The Robinsons were surprised when Governor Ned Lamont decided not to follow CDC guidelines, opting for an age-based approach to the vaccine rollout. Under the new policy, Amanda won't be eligible until mid-April.

"Knowing that this vaccination was coming gave me so much hope and then seeing the sadness and scared, my husband's eyes being so scared. It's a lot," she said breaking down.

Robinson added that it's been hard putting on a brave face for the couple's 7-year-old son.

"I'm sitting here telling him every day that I'm OK, 'Mommy's strong, and I'm strong through all this,' but what happens if that's not the case? What happens if I have to wait for a long period of time and I'm not strong enough to get it, and I have to wait longer, or if I get sick," Robinson said, breaking into tears.

"Giving vaccines to healthy 55-year-olds so they can move on with their life just does not seem like the right thing to do," her husband added.

Although cancer and other immune-compromising diseases are listed as priorities by the CDC, the governor points out that that list doesn't include every preexisting condition, so following those guidelines would still leave the situation inequitable for those left off.

"Their real frustration ought to be with the CDC and the list of co-morbidities that are on there and aren't on there. Folks with intellectual and physical disabilities weren't even on the CDC list, it was really surprising," he said when asked about a civil rights complaint filed against the state.

"Well, nothing prevents him from expanding the list," pointed out Deborah Dorfman, the executive director of Disability Rights Connecticut.

The organization filed that civil rights complaint asking the federal government to step in and order the state to revise its policy, which it says puts a million people ahead of those in their 20s and 30s with preexisting conditions.

"Many people are at serious risk, many people are going to have to wait a long time," said Dorfman.

But cancer patients don't have that time.

"Patients with cancer are more vulnerable to have severe COVID infections," said Dr. Kerin Adelson, Smilow Cancer Hospital's chief quality officer. "There probably is a really good rational for making exceptions for those patients."

In rolling out the plan, the governor explained that he believes the state will capture most people with pre-existing conditions sooner rather than later.

"When we prioritize this population, 65 and above, and on Monday 55 and above, we are taking care of the predominant groups that have comorbidities," he said during a roundtable discussion on Wednesday.

"I do understand the governor is thinking simple and fast may actually get more vulnerable people vaccinated then if there's all of these negotiations and letters required and some of the pitfalls that we've seen in other states," said Adelson.

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Marilyn Miles has been waiting anxiously for her son Bobby to be able to roll-up his sleeve for the vaccine. Bobby was diagnosed with type one diabetes when he was a baby. He's now 18.

"I would love for him to be able to get vaccinated sooner rather than later so he might be able to spend at least a few weeks back in school which he loves before he graduates," said Miles.

Under the new vaccination schedule Bobby won't be eligible until May.

"My heart really sank. I have to say I was pretty disappointed and upset," Miles said she was expecting to hear a different message from the Governor on Monday.

2:33

Group Files Civil Rights Complaint Over Connecticut's Vaccine Rollout Plan

The Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation says waiting is not an option for diabetes patients who are three to four times more likely to have a severe reaction to the virus.

“They are more likely to have poorer outcomes,” explained John Kleinhans of JDRF CT. “Because of our autoimmune system and our lack of response.”

Disability Rights Connecticut believes that the Connecticut's COVID 19 policy discriminates against people with disabilities who have underlying medical conditions. It is estimated that in Connecticut, over 20% of the adult population has some type of disability - many of whom have underlying medical conditions such as high blood pressure, immune compromising diseases and other such conditions placing them at higher risk of contracting COVID 19 and suffering from severe, prolong lasting effects of the virus.

“People who have these serious medical conditions whose lives are at immediate risk,” said Dorfman. “It just leaves out all the people who are younger side who may have serious medical conditions.”

People like Bobby.

“Any illness is complicated for him,” said his mother who will be eligible herself for the vaccine on Monday. “If I could trade places, if I could just get my son vaccinated I would gladly give up my spot.”

Amanda is hoping the governor reconsiders.

“I think he needs to look at it from a medical standpoint and say who are the people that waiting another month is really going to impact and who are the people that can hold off a little longer,” she said. “We didn’t chose to have cancer.”

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