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“The Maine Fire Chiefs Association joins the International Association of Fire Chiefs in supporting the COVID-19 Vaccination Process and encourages all of Maine’s Fire Chiefs to encourage their Fire/EMS Personnel to Receive Vaccines”.

Position

COVID-19 Vaccination Planning and Inoculation

Throughout the response to the SARS-CoV-2 virus, and its ensuing illness COVID-19, fire and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel have consistently served on the front lines while caring for patients and responding to other calls for emergency service. These fire and EMS personnel place themselves in inherently dangerous positions while caring for patients in austere environments and responding to emergencies unrelated to whether a caller has COVID-19. These dangers, combined with unprecedented challenges in accessing personal protective equipment (PPE), have resulted in the deaths of nearly 100 fire and EMS personnel and the quarantine of thousands more. Repeated studies have shown that these fire and EMS personnel can be up to 15 times more likely than the general public to contract COVID-19¹ and are one of the most vulnerable classes of healthcare providers in terms of workplace exposures to COVID-19².

In consideration of the extreme dangers facing fire and EMS personnel during this public health emergency, the IAFC Board of Directors affirms the following recommendations for federal, state and local governments, as well as all fire and EMS chiefs nationwide:

Prioritization of Fire and EMS Personnel for Access to COVID-19 Vaccines:



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Fire and EMS personnel are the “tip of the spear” when it comes to emergency healthcare in every community in the United States. In fact, the 2017 National Hospital Ambulatory Medical

Care Survey (NHAMCS)³ reported that just over 20 million people arrived at the hospital emergency department by the ambulance annually. This does not include the millions of persons transported by ambulance for direct admission to hospitals each year.

On September 1, 2020, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) released their vaccine prioritization recommendations which included all fire and EMS personnel in Priority Tier 1A (the highest tier for access to a COVID-19 vaccine). The NASEM issued this recommendation after noting the critical role that fire and EMS personnel serve in society and the acutely high risks of exposure that they face. The IAFC is deeply troubled by recent state actions to deprioritize fire and EMS personnel. The IAFC, therefore, urges the federal government and all state governments to adopt the NASEM’s recommendation and declare that all Fire and EMS personnel be vaccinated in Priority Tier 1A. All single-role firefighters, single-role EMS providers, and cross-trained Fire/EMS personnel must receive priority access to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines in addition to other PPE.

Need for Fire and EMS Personnel to Receive Vaccines:

Vaccines don’t save lives, vaccinations do. Vaccinations are important forms of protection for all Fire and EMS personnel. But just as important, vaccination of Fire and EMS personnel is an important form of exposure protection for the citizens that call on our Fire and EMS providers for help. - Just as fire departments stress the need for proper wearing of PPE, so too should fire chiefs encourage their personnel to receive approved vaccinations for COVID19, seasonal influenza, and other preventable viruses. These vaccines are one of the most effective means of protection that Fire and EMS personnel can



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receive.

While a vaccination provides our fire and EMS personnel with individual protection from exposure by others, just as importantly a vaccination ensures that our personnel “do no harm” to those who call upon us for emergency services. Upon the approval of a COVID-19 vaccine by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, fire chiefs should encourage their personnel to receive the vaccine. Additionally, fire chiefs should collaborate with their occupation and public health partners to identify vaccination sites for fire and EMS personnel and arrange for on-duty vaccination opportunities when possible.

¹ <https://www.jems.com/2020/11/06/study-first-responders-in-nyc-have-high-covid-19-rates/>

² <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.09.26.20202259v1.full.pdf>

³ https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhamcs/web_tables/2017_ed_web_tables-508.pdf

Submitted by the IAFC Coronavirus Task Force

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