

To: Fire Management Board (FMB) and Non-Federal Wildland Fire Partners

From: COVID-19 Wildland Fire Medical and Public Health Advisory Team (MPHAT)

Date: 2/16/2021

Subject: Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Vaccines for Wildland Fire Personnel

Purpose: The intent of this Memorandum is to release the newest and most pertinent information regarding vaccines for COVID-19 and encourage uptake of the vaccine among wildland fire personnel in preparation for fire assignments during the 2021 fire year. The MPHAT continues to evaluate new information about vaccines, testing, mitigation and prevention strategies to best equip the wildland fire community for a safe, effective, and healthy fire season.

Vaccines will help stop the COVID-19 pandemic - Vaccines are one of the most effective tools available to protect health and prevent disease. Vaccines work with the body's natural defenses so it can be ready to fight if exposed to certain diseases, including COVID-19 (also called "immunity").

Currently available COVID-19 vaccines stimulate an immune response to a component of the virus' outer envelope. This prevents the virus from entering the cells of our bodies and allows our immune system to isolate and eliminate the virus, thus protecting us from infection and from the serious complications from severe infection. These vaccines do not inject the virus itself and will not cause the disease.

New U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorized COVID-19 vaccines meet the same stringent safety and efficacy standards as all other vaccines approved for use within the United States. These COVID-19 vaccines have been rigorously tested for safety and effectiveness in clinical trials involving thousands of people of different ages, races, and ethnicities worldwide. Although some individuals who have received the vaccine have experienced severe allergic reactions, these have been rare, and often occur among individuals who have a history of allergies to vaccines. The side effects from COVID-19 vaccination are typically mild and should go away in a few days. These symptoms may include sore arm, malaise, loss of appetite, fever and headache. While uncomfortable for a few days, these symptoms indicate that the immune system is reacting to the vaccine as intended.

Here are more [facts and dispelled myths about COVID-19 vaccines](#) provided by the Centers for Disease Control.

Wildland fire personnel may be prioritized for COVID-19 vaccines – The [Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices \(ACIP\)](#) has recommended first responders, which include wildland fire personnel, in vaccination phase 1B with essential frontline workers. Based on this, wildfire personnel in the following occupational categories should seek priority vaccination with first responders and essential front-line worker groups:

- Primary fire personnel (i.e. engine, hand crews, and fire management officers),
- Dispatch center personnel (local and regional centers),

- Cache personnel,
- Incident management team members (agency, contract and administratively determined personnel), and
- Anyone with a Red Card maintaining at least one current, certified incident qualification.

Each state has developed its own plan for deciding the timing, allocation, and how to administer vaccine to priority groups. Fire managers, line officers, and agency administrators should immediately contact their state, tribal, territorial, or local health departments for more information on plans for COVID-19 vaccination.

Continue to Prevent COVID-19 After Vaccination – It will take time for anyone receiving a COVID-19 vaccine to build up post-vaccination protection against the disease. Even after vaccination, there is still risk of contracting COVID-19, but the likelihood of severe illness is greatly reduced. Because of this, wildland fire personnel will still need to implement COVID-19 mitigation and prevention strategies to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19 and spreading it to others. This includes continuing to wear a face mask and social distancing, even after getting each shot of the vaccine, for now. While this may be considered burdensome for some, it's important to remember stopping this pandemic as fast as possible requires using all tools available.

Conclusion: It is important for wildland fire personnel to be vaccinated to maintain critical fire operations. Together, getting vaccinated for COVID-19 and continuing to follow COVID-19 mitigation and prevention recommendations will offer the best protection from getting and spreading COVID-19 within the wildland fire community. This protection allows the wildland fire personnel to be prepared for activation in the upcoming wildland season.

Many states are already vaccinating first responders, including wildfire personnel, it is recommended that wildfire personnel contact their state and local health departments for vaccine availability and requirements.

Resources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/facts.html>