

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK



IAFF Position Statement on COVID-19 Vaccines

The IAFF strongly recommends that all IAFF members receive a SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) vaccine to prevent the spread of disease and assist in administering vaccinations in jurisdictions where appropriate measures are taken to protect our members health and safety and their rights on the job when vaccinations are being administered, according to the specifications listed below.

The IAFF strongly recommends all members be vaccinated against the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) for their own protection and the protection of their brothers and sisters, family members, friends and communities. It is critical that members are protected through vaccinations to maintain their readiness to respond to COVID-19 and other emergencies, as the number of positive tests, hospitalizations and deaths from COVID-19 continue to rise amidst flu season.

As fire fighters and medical emergency personnel who work in confined and uncontrolled environments while treating or transporting patients or interacting with the public, members are at a greater risk of contracting COVID-19. As of December 15, 2020, 21 members have died in the line of duty from COVID-19.

The IAFF has urged federal, state and local governments to include fire fighters in Tier 1a for vaccine distribution. In Canada the IAFF has requested the federal government include fire fighters in the same priority group as other healthcare workers.

The Fire Service Joint Labor/Management Wellness-Fitness Initiative (WFI) states, "Uniformed personnel must receive or provide documentation of having received vaccinations." The IAFF and the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) have collectively embraced and promoted this initiative, and we continue to advocate, educate and recommend the COVID-19 vaccine for our members.

Under the advisement and guidance of our Johns Hopkins University medical team and WFI doctors, along with NFPA 1581 *Standard on Fire Department Infection Control Program* and NFPA 1582, *Standard on Comprehensive Occupational Medical Program for Fire Departments*, **the IAFF urges members to be vaccinated for COVID-19.**

The IAFF recognizes that under some circumstances, including sincere religious objections or a bona fide medical reason, fire fighters may object to being vaccinated. These members may be able to obtain an exemption or reasonable accommodation from their fire departments. The IAFF recommends the following guidelines from the NFPA 1581 Standard:

- 4.5.2.5* Members who choose to decline immunizations offered by the department shall be required to sign a written declination.
- 4.5.2.5(a) Members who decline immunizations should be counseled by the fire department physician. If the member persists in refusing vaccination, a signed written declination is required

- 4.5.2.5.1 The declination shall become part of the member's confidential health database
- 4.5.2.5.2 Members shall be allowed to recant a declination at any time and receive the offered immunizations.

In the event the state, provincial or local government or the fire department mandates the vaccine, members may be subject to penalization of workers' compensation, disability or Public Safety Officers' Benefit (PSOB). An exemption or preferred accommodation may be difficult to obtain through a lawsuit as employers are only required to offer a reasonable (not preferred) accommodation and will have little difficulty demonstrating that providing an exemption to a COVID-19 vaccination would cause an undue hardship given that public health and safety are at risk.

While vaccines present minimal side effects, no serious safety or health concerns have been reported at the time this position statement was written. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are molecular RNA based (not a live virus) and both vaccines have a 95% efficacy rate compared to a 40-60% efficacy rate of the influenza (flu) vaccine and provide antibodies and T-cell immunity against COVID-19.

Additionally, due to the public health crisis and state of emergency, the IAFF supports enlisting fire fighter and emergency medical personnel for vaccine distribution under the following conditions:

- Authorized by state, local or medical directors to provide immunizations
- Compensated at overtime rates as this would be in addition to regular shift work
- Assigning members to provide immunizations does not impact the department's staffing levels for responding to emergencies and performing other duties
- Remain covered through workers' compensation and disability
- Have been vaccinated
- Provided the proper training and education in vaccine handling, tracking and administration
- Provided the proper personal protective equipment (PPE) for vaccine distribution
- A safe environment to distribute the vaccine

The IAFF continues to remain engaged with the incoming Biden-Harris administration to ensure fire fighters are given priority access for PPE, testing and vaccinations at the federal level and seeks help from affiliate leaders in engaging governors and state, provincial and local health departments to ensure members remain a priority at the local level.

The IAFF will provide additional COVID-19 vaccination information developed internally and through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to affiliate leaders to promote, educate and advocate for the COVID-19 vaccine for members and their families.

 **For more information, visit www.iaff.org/coronavirus**