



Position Statement

COVID-19 Vaccination of Fire and EMS Personnel

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 213 fire and EMS personnel¹ thus far and the quarantine of thousands more. Repeated studies have shown that fire and EMS personnel can be up to 15 times more likely than the public to contract COVID-19² and are one of the most vulnerable classes of healthcare providers in terms of workplace exposures to COVID-19³.

The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) was an early leader in the pandemic by responding to the crisis through data collection and information sharing with our members, other associations and agencies, and federal partners; legislative advocacy of fire and EMS personnel safety and access to critically needed funding and PPE; providing fire and EMS leaders with weekly updates, education and best practices; and engaging in efforts to minimize the economic impact on fire and EMS services in the communities we serve.

Vaccines have historically proven successful since their introduction through increased protection against severe illness, hospitalization, and even death. But vaccines don't save lives, vaccinations do. A vaccination provides our fire and EMS personnel with individual protection from exposure by others, but just as importantly, a vaccination ensures that our personnel "do no harm" to those who call upon us for emergency services.

As the fire service is the largest provider of EMS in North America, and in consideration of the extreme dangers facing fire and EMS personnel during this ongoing public health

¹ Staff, National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, First Responder Center for Excellence. (2021, August 11). Survey: Reported COVID-related fatalities for Fire and EMS.

² Staff, Journal of Emergency Medical Services. (2020, December 21). *Study: First Responders in NYC Have High COVID-19 Rates*. JEMS. <https://www.jems.com/news/study-first-responders-in-nyc-have-high-covid-19-rates/>

³ Laursen, J., Petersen, J., Didriksen, M., Iversen, K., & Ullum, H. (2021). Prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 IgG/IgM Antibodies among Danish and Swedish Falck Emergency and Non-Emergency Healthcare Workers. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(3), 923. MDPI AG. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18030923>

emergency, the IAFC Board of Directors affirms the following recommendation for all federal, state, provincial, territorial, and local government fire and EMS chiefs:

Upon the approval of a COVID-19 vaccine by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the IAFC calls upon all fire chiefs to advocate for the mandatory vaccination of all of their fire and EMS department personnel against the COVID-19 virus by an FDA approved COVID-19 vaccine, except for those who cannot be vaccinated due to qualified medical conditions or a sincerely held religious belief, practice, or observance. Additionally, the IAFC recommends that fire chiefs collaborate with their occupational and public health partners to identify the most expeditious means for their fire and EMS department personnel to obtain the vaccination.

The IAFC is committed to the health and safety of our fire and EMS department personnel, and we will continue to focus on fire and EMS personnel safety and advocate for mission critical funding and equipment to assist fire chiefs in continuing to provide life-saving emergency services to their communities in the face of the economic impact and revenue loss they have suffered because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Adopted by the IAFC Board of Directors: 24 AUG 2021