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**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
COVID-19 Vaccines for USDA Employees
January 8, 2021**

These FAQs are for the purpose of communicating with employee's and providing current information from USDA with respect to the first phase of COVID-19 vaccines. This document will be updated as new information is received.

1. How is the first round of COVID-19 vaccines being dispensed?

Because the supply of COVID-19 vaccine in the United States is limited at first, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is providing recommendations to federal, state, and local governments about who should be vaccinated first. CDC's recommendations are based on recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices an independent panel of medical and public health experts. The CDC's most current recommendations can be found on their website at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations.html>.

The recommendations were made with these goals in mind:

- Decrease death and serious disease as much as possible.
- Preserve functioning of society.
- Reduce the extra burden COVID-19 is having on people already facing disparities.

2. How do Federal Employees fit into this first round?

Outside of a few agencies, such as the Department of Defense, Veterans Affairs and Department of Homeland Security, which will receive vaccines directly for their internal use, the State Health Departments will determine the prioritization of vaccine administration within their respective states, to include consideration of essential federal workers.

3. Are USDA Employees identified to receive priority consideration for the COVID-19 vaccine?

USDA is encouraging the State Health Departments to include USDA essential employees whose mission critical activities cannot be done remotely in their Phase 1b vaccination plans. These include essential employees at:

- Forest Service
- Food Safety and Inspection Service
- Office of Inspector General
- Marketing and Regulatory Programs



USDA has provided the number of essential employees in these Agencies, by state and county, to states for States to consider in their vaccine allocation at the state level.

4. Which positions were identified by USDA as essential workers and how will they be prioritized?

No USDA Mission Area or Agency has been given a direct vaccine allotment. States are responsible for determining its vaccine prioritization. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices continues to provide recommendations to States. While USDA has thousands of essential employees in its workforce, which are defined as employees whose mission critical activities cannot be done remotely, states will make the final determination of how vaccine distribution is prioritized.

Within the Forest Service the following positions were identified as essential workers and may be considered by the States in their Phase 1b vaccine allotment:

- Law Enforcement & Investigations
- First responder firefighter types (arduous)
- Dispatchers and National Interagency Incident Communications Division - NIFC Radio
- Cache and Fire Cache personnel
- Aviation personnel/pilots/flight crews and tanker base personnel
- IMT members (Type 1 and seasonality for IMT2s)
- Other red-carded personnel
- Regional Fire staff
- National Fire staff
- Non-medical staff at Job Corps centers

5. Are the COVID-19 vaccines mandatory?

USDA continues to monitor guidance from other applicable Federal agencies, such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Office of Personnel Management, on this question. At this time, there is no USDA requirement that the COVID-19 vaccine is mandatory.

6. Will USDA facilities be used to support the distribution of the vaccine in rural areas?

It is possible that counties or states may reach out to request the use of USDA facilities. Please send the requests to your Pandemic Coordinator so that USDA can determine whether it can comply with the state and CDC requirements before entering into an agreement to distribute the vaccine.