Member Advisory

Who: Water Sector Coordinating Council
What: Contact state and local public health agencies about COVID-19 vaccine distribution
When: Now

As you have likely seen in the news, distribution of COVID-19 vaccines has started. In a memo distributed to U.S. water and wastewater utilities, The Water Sector Coordinating Council (WSCC), which consists of representatives from the national water and wastewater organizations, is urging drinking water and wastewater utilities across the country to contact their state and local public health agencies to ensure their staff members are included in Phase 1-B of their communities’ COVID-19 vaccine distribution.

In the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) COVID-19 Vaccination Program Interim Playbook for Jurisdiction Operations, water and wastewater utility employees are eligible to be included in Phase 1-B since they have the federal designation of “essential workers.”

The memo states the importance of contacting local government officials saying, “Local engagement is critical because, while the federal government has issued recommendations for vaccine prioritization, the final decisions related to planning and distribution will occur at the state and local levels. In a December 7 email to Water and Wastewater Sector partners, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Water Security Division recognized the CDC’s interim playbook ‘recommends non-health care essential workers, which include water utility staff, receive priority in Phase 1-B’ and stated it ‘recommends water utilities coordinate with their state and local governments and health departments regarding vaccination distribution planning.’”

AWWA and other water sector associations have drafted a template letter for utilities to use when contacting their state and local health authorities. The template language is also included below.

Questions can be directed to Kevin Morley, AWWA’s federal relations manager.

Date
Address

RE: COVID-19 Vaccinations for Water and Wastewater Sector

Dear [Name]:
As [name of state or local agency] develops plans for distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine, [name of utility] asks that our frontline utility staff members receive priority in Phase 1-B. This phase includes “people who play a key role in keeping essential functions of society running and cannot socially distance in the workplace,” as described in the Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC) COVID-19 Vaccination Program Interim Playbook for Jurisdiction Operations.

Vaccinating frontline water and wastewater utility staff members is particularly important because, as a lifeline sector, water and wastewater sector services underpin all aspects of society, including hospitals and long-term care facilities. Due to the specialized skills and licenses required for utility operations, and the corresponding challenges in finding replacements for staff members who may become ill or exposed, it is essential to mitigate staff members’ COVID-19 risks through all possible means, including vaccinations.

[Name of utility] provides water [and/or wastewater] services to residents of [name of community]. In addition, we provide services for [describe hospitals and other critical facilities in service area]. Our services are essential for keeping these facilities operating and for protecting public health. We estimate that [number of staff] essential staff members should be given priority for the vaccine in Phase 1-B.

I appreciate your consideration of our critical water workers in your vaccine prioritization plans. Please contact me at [contact info] if you have any questions or would like to discuss vaccine prioritization for our workers.

Sincerely,

[Name]
[Title]