

Water Sector Coordinating Council



TO: U.S. Water and Wastewater Utilities

FR: Water Sector Coordinating Council

DT: December 14, 2020

RE: COVID-19 Vaccinations for the Water and Wastewater Sector

The Water Sector Coordinating Council, comprising representatives of the national water and wastewater organizations, urges 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 plans. Based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [COVID-19 Vaccination Program Interim Playbook for Jurisdiction Operations](#), water and wastewater utility employees should be among those eligible for inclusion in this early phase given their [federal designation](#) as "essential workers." However, it is critical for utilities to work with local agencies to ensure this federal guidance translates into local action.

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.

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."

It is important to reach out to state and local public health agencies soon, as prioritization decisions are being made now. Following these conversations, utilities should begin to develop internal priorities for vaccinations, recognizing that utilities may not receive enough doses to vaccinate every staff member. These priorities will be unique to the operational requirements of each utility and should ensure that allocated doses are distributed in a way that effectively protects the sector's core public health mission.

The council thanks the nation's water and wastewater utilities for their contributions to the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nicholas Santillo, Jr.
American Water
WSCC Chair

Jim Wollbrinck
San Jose Water
WSCC Vice Chair

The Water Sector Coordinating Council is a policy, strategy and coordination mechanism for the Water and Wastewater Sector in interactions with the government and other sectors on critical infrastructure security and resilience issues.