



International Association of Fire Chiefs

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July 14, 2020

Jose Romero, MD, FAAP
Chair
Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices
U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road, NE
Mailstop A27
Atlanta, GA 30329-4027

Dear Dr. Romero:

On behalf of the more than 13,000 chief fire and emergency medical services (EMS) officers of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), I urge you to ensure that firefighters and EMS personnel are placed on the highest priority tier for receiving COVID-19 vaccinations when they are available. America's first responders are serving bravely as the tip of the spear in the battle against the SARS-CoV-2 virus and its resulting illness, COVID-19. First responders are placing themselves in immediate danger of contracting the virus while they care for COVID-19 patients. This danger is evident in the fact that nearly 60 firefighters and EMS personnel have died after contracting COVID-19 and thousands more have been placed in quarantine or isolation. It is imperative that our first responders are afforded every possible protection and vaccinations are a critical component to that protection.

As you know, fire departments and EMS agencies are an important piece of the healthcare system and provide pre-hospital emergency medical care and transportation to ill and injured patients. Each year, more than 30 million patients enter the healthcare system through an ambulance and COVID-19 patients are no exception. Firefighters and EMS personnel place themselves in harm's way when caring for COVID-19 patients in uncontrolled environments like a patient's home or in an ambulance. Protecting firefighters and EMS personnel is all the more difficult since a patient's COVID-19 status may be unknown in the field. As a result, firefighters and EMS personnel must treat all patients as potentially COVID-19 positive as any lapses or complacency in infection control procedures could have serious consequences.

Sadly, fire departments and EMS agencies still face chronic challenges in protecting their personnel due to earlier decisions by federal and state government agencies to de-prioritize fire departments and EMS agency access to COVID-19 testing and personal protective equipment (PPE). Many of these issues stem from failures to recognize the importance of pre-hospital EMS and the artificial discrepancy that was made by excluding firefighters and EMS personnel from the prioritized protections and testing afforded to in-facility healthcare workers. The failure to prioritize firefighters and EMS personnel along with other healthcare workers cannot be repeated. As the federal government implements Operation Warp Speed and develops a vaccine

distribution strategy, firefighters and EMS personnel must be included in the highest priority tier. It is critical that our nation's first responders are protected in order to maintain their readiness to respond to future waves of COVID-19, "routine" emergencies, and major incidents such as natural disasters and acts of terrorism.

On behalf of the leadership of more than one million firefighters and EMS personnel across the United States, I urge you to take decisive action to protect our protectors. Ensuring firefighters and EMS personnel have prioritized access to vaccinations is vital to remaining prepared for any biological, natural, or man-made emergency which we might face.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gary Ludwig". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Gary" and the last name "Ludwig" clearly distinguishable.

Fire Chief Gary Ludwig
President and Chairman of the Board

/ed