



United States Department of Agriculture

Food Safety and
Inspection Service

1400 Independence
Avenue, SW.
Washington, D.C.
20250

January 8, 2021

Dear State Departments of Health and Agriculture,

We have received several questions regarding where USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) mission critical workforce should be included in State vaccination plans. As noted in the Secretary's letter to governors in December, FSIS personnel are essential to securing the safety of the nation's food supply.

On December 20, 2020, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) updated its interim COVID-19 vaccine allocation recommendations. These recommendations have been published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention¹, and state that in Phase 1b, the COVID-19 vaccine should be offered to persons aged ≥ 75 years and non-health care frontline essential workers.

The ACIP utilized guidance² from the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to define frontline essential workers likely at highest risk for work-related exposure to COVID-19, because their work-related duties must be performed on-site. The CISA guidance specifies regulatory and government workforce to be among the essential workers in the food and agriculture industries.

Employees across USDA are engaged in essential government services supporting the critical Federal infrastructure as defined by CISA. The following functions are the essential government service or activity which prioritizes USDA employees as members of Phase 1b for COVID-19 vaccination:

- ***Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)***: Meat, poultry, swine and egg inspection, investigation, district office personnel, and related laboratory services.
- ***Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service***: Inspection of live plants and animals; managing animal and plant disease programs; veterinary, aviation and laboratory services in support of these operations.
- ***Agricultural Marketing Service***: Commodity grading, commodity procurement, market news, and protecting fair agriculture trade performed by employees in the Agriculture Marketing Service.
- ***And other pertinent USDA agencies***

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm695152e2.htm?s_cid=mm695152e2_w

²

https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ECIW_4.0_Guidance_on_Essential_Critical_Infrastructure_Workers_Final3_508_0.pdf

We appreciate your consideration of the USDA essential workers outlined above who are critical in agriculture, food safety, food production and supply and protecting the health, welfare and safety of the public. As you develop your individual State vaccination plans, please include the essential USDA employees in Phase 1b of individual State vaccination plans.

Additionally, some private corporations, such as meat and poultry processing plants, may undertake vaccination efforts for their own employees, but not for federal employees. USDA employees providing essential services at those locations would still need to be included and accounted for in State vaccination plans.

USDA is prepared to provide essential worker information to State and County health officials, including the number of employees, their names, residence, and duty locations, to assist in State efforts to vaccinate Phase 1b priority groups. FSIS essential employees can furnish their Federal Government identification and a copy of a letter documenting essential worker status.

While the vaccine is not mandatory, we trust that the States will ensure priority is given to our essential workers as appropriate. If you have any additional questions or concerns, please contact FSIS' Chief Operating Officer, Jeremy "Todd" Reed, at jeremy.reed@usda.gov or (202) 573-1824.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul A. Kiecker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "P" and a long, sweeping underline.

Paul A. Kiecker
Administrator