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Firefighters at top of list to receive COVID-19 vaccine

By Nick Marnell

Firefighters will be among the first to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, according to county health officials. The first batch of the vaccine arrived in Contra Costa County Dec. 15. Healthcare workers were the first to be vaccinated, and according to Contra Costa Health Services, firefighter-paramedics and other emergency medical service providers are prioritized in Phase 1A of the federal and state vaccination allocation guidelines, so the vaccine should be available to them soon. However, no specific distribution plan has been announced.

Once the details are confirmed, Lamorinda fire agencies plan to follow county guidelines regarding vaccine distribution to their employees, with the firefighters union saying it will be up to the rank and file whether they choose to be vaccinated.

"We haven't taken a position on the vaccine other than the fact that the first rounds that are available should be available for first responders, including firefighters, once the vaccine is released. And that is only for those who chose to take it," said Vince Wells, president of Local 1230 of the International Association of Firefighters.

Speaking for the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator Dennis Rein said that the district will follow in line with the county priorities regarding vaccination procedures and distribution.

The Contra Costa County Fire Protection District remains upbeat regarding the effectiveness of the vaccine.

"While there is no COVID-19 vaccination mandate we are aware of for anyone, the benefits are obvious and the published side effects limited," said district spokesman Steve Hill. "We are sharing this information with our employees and encouraging them to carefully consider it when making personal decisions about the vaccines."

At least one Lamorinda firefighter will need no encouragement to be vaccinated. "I am excited to be receiving the vaccine soon. It will give me and my family another strong layer of protection as I work alongside other first responders and healthcare workers fighting this pandemic," said MOFD firefighter Mark DeWeese.

Reach the reporter at: nick@lamorindaweekly.com

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