



March 30, 2021

Idaho Department of Health and Welfare
Washington State Health Care Authority
Oregon Health Authority

Re: Priority Consideration for COVID-19 Vaccination

Dear Health Authorities,

The guiding and outfitting and ski industry have been dedicated to anticipating and mitigating the effects of Covid-19 on their staff, families, clients, communities and businesses. Our industries have been critical in providing communities, particularly those in rural areas, with economic input and activity during this unprecedented time.

As we approach broader vaccination availability for certain categories of workers, guides and outfitters and ski industry professionals face uncertainty about being able to adequately vaccinate their staff as their spring and summer seasons quickly approach, and we collectively ask for further vaccine consideration for ski area staff, and for guides and outfitters.

Background

The guiding and outfitting industry, and the ski industry have been dedicated to anticipating and mitigating the effects of Covid-19 on their staff, families, clients, communities and businesses. State and federal authorities understand that outfitter and guide businesses and ski industry businesses are unique, and over the past year, we have, respectively, developed responsible operating plans and protocols.

The demand for outdoor recreation that we saw last summer, combined with this winter's demand, overwhelmingly indicates that residents and visitors will continue to seek outdoor recreation—and we would like to provide those opportunities in the healthiest way possible. Having a fully vaccinated workforce as soon as possible is critical to our business operations and our communities.

Outfitters and guides, and the ski industry were among the few service-related industries that did remarkably well through the pandemic¹, and were able to provide visitors and residents unique access and opportunity to recreate safely and responsibly.

Our industries have also been critical in continuing to provide some of our most vulnerable communities, in rural areas, with economic input and activity during this trying time. As we approach broader vaccination availability, on a priority basis to certain categories of workers, guides and outfitters and ski industry professionals face uncertainty about being able to adequately vaccinate their staff as their spring and summer seasons quickly approach.

Interpretation of CDC Recommendations

The list provided by the CDC categorizes workers based on the industry (type of business) in which they work, not based on their occupation (a person's specific job). Although workers' status as essential under the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency's (CISA) guidance is most readily determined by the industry in which they work, their exposure risk may be largely determined by their occupation. Because the most efficient vaccination allocation strategy will take both essentiality and risk into account, jurisdictions should, where feasible, make efforts to prioritize workers in occupations characterized by the inability to work remotely and the need to work in close proximity to others within the below industries, as implied by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' (ACIP) definition of Essential Non-Healthcare Workers.²

As restaurant workers become eligible for the vaccine, we ask for further vaccine consideration for ski area staff, and for guides and outfitters. While ski areas do have restaurant workers, who will become eligible for vaccination along with their restaurant peers across the state, this leaves other front line workers at ski areas exposed. Think: lift operators, ski and snowboard instructors, lodge cleaning staff, and more. Nearly every ski area staff member comes into contact with our skiing guests as much as our food workers do. We would like for all ski area staff members to receive the vaccine at the same time that their restaurant co-workers do. Some guides and outfitters may receive priority vaccination if they qualify as a first responder, however, this leaves many of their guides exposed - guides and outfitters who still are at a high risk of exposure from contact, and requirements of their work in serving clients who travel regionally, across states, nationally, and internationally.

In addition to being unable to work remotely and necessarily working in close proximity with others, outfitters and guides are generally de facto first responders in the execution of their job

¹ Idaho only had one confirmed COVID-19 positive case associated with the client-facing operation of an outfitted excursion from Spring 2020 through present. In Oregon, there have been no known or reported instances of confirmed COVID-19 positive cases associated with the client-facing operation of an outfitted excursion from Spring 2020 through present.

² <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/categories-essential-workers.html>

duties— whether they carry a first responder equivalent certification (Wilderness First Responder/Aid, EMT, etc.) or basic first-aid/CPR. The nature of guided outdoor recreation activities overwhelmingly find the outfitted public and outfitter/guide staff in remote locations, with comparatively difficult access. As such, whether in the middle of a wilderness area, hundreds of miles from the nearest medical services, or on a river 20-miles from the nearest town, guides are effectively, as a rule, first-responders in the event of an incident.

Early vaccination for workers in our industries will not only help ensure that state populations gain immunity at a faster rate, but will immediately create healthy work environments for not only the remainder of the ski season, but also in preparation for summer operations for both the mountain resorts, and for the broader guiding and outfitting industry.

Request for Priority Vaccination

Like other service industry workers that are prioritized in vaccination (wait staff, grocery workers), guides and outfitters and ski industry workers have a lot of interaction with the public—and similarly, cannot work from home. Additionally, due to the nature of the work, many guides/outfitters, and ski industry workers often live in communal living situations - which puts them at a greater risk, if not vaccinated prior to their work season starting. Many guides and outfitters and ski industry workers may qualify for early vaccination, if they are certified/licensed as first responder, or if they are classified as a food service worker. this does not cover the entirety of the workforce.

Inoculating flight crews and public transit workers is a great start;however, this only protects against high risk transmission until folks get to 'us' - the service providers. In order to protect the rural, recreational communities and economies visitors are traveling to, it is necessary to also provide opportunity for those 'destination' frontline workers to similarly be inoculated. We ask that guides and outfitters be given priority to receive the vaccination, as front-line workers, ahead of the open vaccination schedule, due to the nature of their work, inability to work remotely, and the high risk of exposure and infection without receiving vaccination prior to the start of their upcoming season(s) of work.

Sincerely,

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