To: Senator Dianne Feinstein  
From: [Redacted], HSC-335 Fall 2020  
Re: Prioritizing critical risk workers in COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation

Background

- The talk all over news and media focuses on healthcare workers who need to be first prioritized for the newly developed COVID-19 vaccine. However, we cannot forget about the critical risk workers, also commonly referred to as essential workers, who also risk their lives working on the frontlines to provide services to the public. Such essential frontline workers can be categorized as food service workers, grocery store and drugstore workers, transportation service workers, maintenance workers, and many more.¹
- The individuals of these categories take on roles of servicing society. They work to serve others just as much as healthcare workers do. Customer service jobs can potentially be just as harsh of a job as it is being a healthcare worker. They are potentially exposed to more people in a day than a healthcare worker may be exposed to. General essential workers are most likely not provided or recommended the same personal protective equipment (PPE) as healthcare workers are, in order to reduce the risk of infection.²
- During the beginning of the pandemic, a PPE shortage has brought a lot of stress to those who were non-healthcare workers because they could not get their hands on supplies due to PPE being prioritized to hospitals and healthcare workers. A study shows that two-thirds of employees out of 8,000 workers from nearly 50 big service-sector companies reported that company provided PPE such as masks and gloves were not prioritized.³
- Individuals who are not healthcare workers also do not have the same type of training against illnesses which creates confusion or misuse of protective wear when it is needed. Public health sectors such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), create guidelines for the general public on what type of protective wear to use or how to use them but the use of protective wear is loosely regulated at essential workplaces that is not considered a healthcare facility.
- A study shows that there is as many as 74 million essential workers, which 61% of that number is at an increased risk for severe exposure to COVID-19. Keep in mind that a very large percentage of essential workers go home to families or housemates which increases the spread of the virus to another population of people.⁴
- In California alone, we hold an estimate of 7.4 million non-healthcare essential workers.⁵ If this population is not prioritized for the COVID-19 vaccine, the virus will have its potential to spread amongst them since it is such a large population.

Impact of Early Vaccination on critical risk workers

- Since essential workers have higher and longer exposure rates to people outside of their household, early vaccination will provide them protection during these exposure times which initially put them at a higher risk of infection.
- Besides being protected themselves, the vaccine will provide protection to people who will be around them.⁶ This will include the people they are servicing and also the people they go home to. Vaccinating such a large population will create a positive ripple effect in preventing the spread of the virus.
- Many essential workers are at risk of needing to put a halt to their job to quarantine if they become infected. Some essential workers have also lost their jobs due to businesses being unable to stay open due to the pandemic. Most essential workers cannot afford to miss work or even lose their jobs.⁷ Early vaccination on essential workers will provide financial and job security as they will be able to continue working or find work to earn money. Essential business owners will be able to keep the businesses open and provide such essential jobs.

---

Impact of Early Vaccination on Other Groups, State/Local Community

- Healthcare workers are projected to have first priority for early vaccination. This population of people have the highest exposure to COVID-19 as they are dealing with individuals who have been exposed to the virus. Good, maintained health is what keeps people alive and healthcare workers are those who contribute to that.
- The elderly population is projected to have priority for the vaccination following healthcare workers. As we age, our immune cells become less responsive. COVID-19 is a deadly virus and it can attack the body very quickly and damagingly. Early vaccination for the elderly will provide them protection as their immune systems are much more fragile than people of younger age.
- COVID-19 has disproportionately affected racial minorities all across the United States. Minorities contributed largely to the United States’ skyrocketing numbers of infection, hospitalizations, and deaths. These minority populations are known to have lack of access to healthcare, COVID-19 testing, and other resources that would prevent them from becoming ill. Early vaccination amongst this group will lessen the risk of infection and also prevent potential or further poverty amongst this large and underrepresented population.

Congressional Activity

- CARES Act was passed by the Senate and signed into law by the president in March of 2020. It has provided emergency assistance and health care response for individuals, families, and businesses affected by the pandemic.
- Families First Coronavirus Response Act was signed into law on March 18, 2020. It has provided additional flexibility for state unemployment insurance agencies and additional administrative funding in response to the pandemic.
- The Heroes Act is a bill in response to the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on the economy, public health, state and local governments, individuals, and businesses. It has been passed by the House of Representatives on May 15, 2020, but has yet to be passed by the Senate. This bill will provide additional stimulus payments, expansion of paid leave as well as tax credits and deductions, eliminate cost-sharing for COVID-19 treatments, housing assistance, and much more. It is said that the bill is too high in cost with irrelevant provisions and lack of bipartisan support, that is keeping the bill from passing.
- The COVID-19 relief bill is a $908 billion COVID-19 relief proposal. It proposes an additional $300 weekly benefit to those who are claiming unemployment benefits, for 16 weeks. The bill would also provide extended benefits to programs that are expected to seize at the end of December. In addition, funds would be allocated to vaccine development, distribution, contact tracing, and COVID-19 testing.

Policy Recommendation

- Critical risk workers, also referred to as essential workers, should be largely prioritized in vaccine distribution as they make up a big proportion of the United States’ overall population. Although their exposure to confirmed cases of the virus is less than actual healthcare workers, being exposed to the unknown is more frightening as these essential workers are in potentially less protected workspaces.
- Identify the workers within the essential worker population who are at highest risk, with either age range or underlying health conditions. These categories should be prioritized first before others as they are more susceptible to the virus.
- Implement mandatory paid sick-leave or time off that has complimenting documentation of legitimate reasoning for such request of leave. This will provide financial and job security for essential workers who cannot afford to take time off when needed as the pandemic has caused, and continue to cause, many unforeseen circumstances.
- Provide additional assistance to low-income earners. Many essential workers are suffering from working cut hours, minimum wage jobs while living in high cost areas because of layoffs, and increased need in supplies for protection.

---

9 https://theconversation.com/why-we-should-prioritise-older-people-when-we-get-a-covid-vaccine-148432
10 https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2771874
11 https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/3548/text?q=product+actualizaci%C3%B3n
12 https://www.dol.gov/coronavirus/unemployment-insurance