

Advocate for Farmworker Priority for COVID Vaccinations

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the fact that farmworkers are among the most vulnerable population among essential workers today. There must be a concerted effort on the part of California government officials to make sure the factors that put them at-risk most for COVID-19 exposure are addressed. A policy brief released in November by the COVID-19 Farmworker and Rural Immigrant Community Advocacy Coalition, outlines the needs and obstacles farmworkers face in gaining quality health care and makes a case for placing them in the top priority phase in the California Vaccination Plan being implemented soon. Interfaith Food joins the Coalition in recognizing the crucial role farmworkers play in California's economy in the midst of the pandemic. We join the call for the state to prioritize farmworkers as soon COVID-19 vaccinations are available. The Coalitions' briefing, written by California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation (CRLAF) states "given the reticence and inability of California's agricultural workers to access the American healthcare system, work needs to begin now to educate farmworker communities and prepare them for the eventual vaccinations that will keep them and their communities safe."

Join us in advocating to the California COVID-19 Community Advisory Committee for prioritization of the health and safety of Californian farmworkers. Please submit an email with your public comment before the end of December, 2020 to the California Department of Public Health at covid19outreach@cdph.ca.gov. (If you do submit comments please cc' us at info@interfaithfood.org.)

Points you may want to touch on in your comments include:

- California's 800,000 agricultural workers are an essential workforce responsible for sustaining California's \$50 billion agricultural industry and the production of America's fresh food supply.
- Farmworkers faced higher exposure to COVID-19 than other workers due to exposure in the fields, in the commute to work, and in extremely overcrowded housing.
- Farmworkers fall into many high risk categories for COVID-19 and should be given the highest priority for distribution of a safe vaccine for Phase 1 of the California's plan.

For more information and a link to the briefing report click [here](#).

Recommendations from CRLA included:

1. The California Vaccination Plan needs to prioritize farmworkers by clearly placing them in Phase 1. They are essential workers with elevated risk of exposure at work and home, and reluctant to access to health services.

2. The Vaccination Plan should have a farmworker specific component developed by an expert sub-team composed of ag worker data experts, community outreach and communication experts and community based organizations. The challenges of enumerating farmworkers and understanding how to reach them in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways require an intense and informed process to ensure that vaccines are equitably available to farmworker communities. The plan should identify appropriate locations to reach farmworkers where they live, work and congregate.

3. The Vaccination Plan should be respectful of cultural values and personal rights so farmworkers can make informed decisions about vaccines for their families, free of undue influence from government and employers.

4. Outreach and education through trusted messengers (e.g. community health promoters, community organizations, labor groups, faith communities, public health) should begin now, as vaccines are tested and vetted. To overcome the fears of cost, health consequences and accessing care, as well as the barriers of language, distance and time, a targeted educational campaign must start immediately. Particular focus on the 30 percent of farmworkers who are women and the nearly half (47%) who are married parents can broaden the acceptance of vaccines for the whole family. Conclusion The nation's food system and the health of rural California are at stake during COVID-19. Given the heightened risk of COVID-19 that California farmworkers, their families and communities face, farmworkers should be given the highest priority in COVID-19 vaccine distribution. Overcoming systemic health access barriers and the reluctance of farmworkers to seek services requires specific planning and concerted outreach and education efforts to farmworker communities if California is to be successful in equitable vaccine distribution.

The full briefing can be found at: [CRLA 11-2020 Farmer COVID Briefing](#)