

Priority COVID-19 Vaccination of U.S. Port Workers

Due to the constant risk of exposure and transmittal of COVID-19, U.S. port workers should be considered for priority vaccination.

The marine transportation system (MTS) is the epicenter of the U.S. domestic and international supply chain. Port and related workers play a critical role to support the distribution of vitally important personal protective equipment, ventilators, and other urgent medical supplies, as well as the myriad of goods citizens rely upon. But port workers are vulnerable to the risk of exposure and transmittal of COVID-19 due to the constant flow of trucks, warehouse and dock workers, crew from vessels, and federal inspectors.

Port and related workers include longshoremen, stevedores, checkers, warehouse personnel, crane operators, truckers, rail operators, shipbuilders, ferry boat operators, and port authority personnel. Each of these jobs is essential to keeping the supply chain moving. More importantly, the health and well-being of port workers has been under extraordinary stress – the same as other essential workers. As U.S. ports became more congested, the pressure to maintain a high level of performance and a full cadre of healthy workers took its toll. Even the slightest of disruption to the supply chain ecosystem has severe consequences as was evident with the increasing number of ships waiting to unload medical and cleaning supplies, and personal protective equipment along with other essential cargo at California ports. Notwithstanding the extensive precautions taken, labor unions representing port workers in American ports reported a significant rise in the number of COVID positive cases, including deaths, among port workers.

All frontline critical infrastructure essential workers are important. The nation is dependent upon port workers who must be protected to maintain the supply chain and get goods to businesses and households. Port workers should be considered for priority vaccination.

Source: CMTS C-19 Working Group (https://www.cmts.gov/topics/working_group).