

September 23, 2021

Medical Director Recommendation

Re: Vaccination against SARS-CoV-2

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented disruption. Each of us has sacrificed in our efforts to try to serve patients and to support community health. And yet, we are still challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite ongoing extraordinary efforts, persons continue to die from this infection in King County. Moreover, the resources needed to care for patients with COVID-19 has led to deferred treatment for many with serious medical needs unrelated to COVID-19, a reality that also produces adverse health outcomes.

The public health toll is unacceptable especially given that we have effective tools to prevent SARS-CoV-2 infection. Our pledge to protect and serve our patients requires that we commit to the safest, most effective strategy to control and overcome the pandemic. This is our responsibility as public servants and health leaders. The approach requires that we employ all methods to include social distancing, appropriate personal protective equipment, testing, and vaccination. Social distancing, PPE, and testing are useful strategies that supplement, but do not circumvent, the cornerstone therapy of vaccination against SARS-CoV-2. A strategy that employs all these tools provides safety for the individual EMS provider, their colleagues, patients, and the larger public.

Our recommendation as Medical Program Directors for Seattle and King County EMS is that EMS agencies require full vaccination against SARS-CoV-2 in order to provide direct patient care. Consequently, we appreciate that accommodations need to be individualized but providing direct patient care when not fully vaccinated may compromise workplace safety and put vulnerable patients at risk.

We recommend that you notify employees that they may make requests for a reasonable accommodation based on a medical disability or for sincerely held religious beliefs. Your agency should determine if the employee is eligible to be considered for an accommodation and engage in an interactive process before making the determination. After the eligibility decision, you should determine if the employee can be *safely* accommodated given the unique elements of the law, their job and work options, understanding that there are likely limited options for accommodations and you may not be able to accommodate all requests. Examples of an undue burden for the purpose of accommodating a sincerely held religious belief include if the accommodation is costly, infringes on other employees' job rights or benefits, compromises workplace safety, decreases workplace efficiency, or requires other employees to do more than their share of potentially hazardous or burdensome work.

When a patient calls 9-1-1 for a medical emergency, they often have no other option for health care – 9-1-1 is their only recourse – EMS cannot pick and choose who and how to respond. We must serve our patients and the community in a manner that achieves the highest level of safety for all. EMS providers in King County are leaders in emergency care who repeatedly make important sacrifices to serve those around them. We must do our best to deliver safe and effective health care, a commitment and pledge that requires vaccination against SARS-CoV-2.

Respectfully,

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