



International Organization of
Masters, Mates & Pilots

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Governor Andrew Cuomo
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224
Email: gov.cuomo@chamber.state.ny.us

Dr. Howard Zucker, Commissioner
NY State Department of Health
Corning Tower
Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY
Email: nrs02@health.state.ny.us

RE: Access to COVID-19 Vaccine for Deep-Sea Mariners

Dear Governor Cuomo and Commissioner Zucker:

We are writing on behalf of maritime workers in New York who make their living aboard vessels of all types and who are responsible for the marine supply chain and a large sector of the state's economy. Deep sea merchant seamen in particular, have been almost completely ignored during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The members of my organization are urging you to take effective action. This is necessary because of the almost complete absence of any meaningful initiative by the federal government in providing access to vaccines to U.S. mariners.

It should be noted that it is very hard to contain the spread of the virus on the close confines of a ship. One infected crewmember may readily infect the entire ship's crew, most often with no Medivac available. Seafarers don't have access to ventilators or doctors on container ships and most other vessels while at sea and foreign governments seldom let our crews travel to hospitals during the pandemic. We are a special case that needs special attention. Inoculation is critical for these essential front-line workers.

We recognize the priorities established by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) classifies merchant seamen as "other essential workers" in priority phase 1c along with 57 million other workers and after the vaccination of approximately 30 million workers in Phase 1b. However, our reason for appealing to you is grave concern about access to vaccinations within Phase 1c by our very mobile workforce. This workforce does not fall routinely under the jurisdiction of any one particular state, but many work in and out of the Port of New York/New Jersey. A similar letter is being sent to your opposite numbers in New Jersey. At a time when vaccines will soon be theoretically available to everyone over age 16, at-risk mariners, are left-out simply because no accommodation has been made to give them access to vaccines.

Under the risk-based approach, seafarers rank high on three of the four criteria: risk of acquiring infection, risk of negative societal impact and risk of transmitting to others. Seafarers by nature of their work travel to all parts of the world and regularly interact with people from other countries, cultures, health systems. Even during heightened awareness of COVID-19 with precautionary measures in place, vessel crews are at great risk of contracting the virus. The industry has experienced and will continue to experience COVID-19 outbreaks aboard ship.



American seafarers represent a miniscule population when compared to almost every other sector which is given priority in the ACIP framework. In New York we estimate that there are approximately 4,000 mariners who transit the state joining or departing their vessels or who call in New York's ports. We seek your support in providing vaccinations at facilities that will accommodate vessel crews, including out-of-state U.S mariners who have registered for inoculation on short notice, ideally with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, as scheduling a return to the same port within the appropriate time frame is exceedingly problematic. This can be done cooperatively with U.S-flag employers. Under the guidance of the New York State Department of Health and the appropriate medical provider, this should not be difficult.

Our numbers are not great, but we play an outsized role in maintaining the economic and military security of our nation. Without action by New York and other states, personnel losses due to COVID-19 will have a disproportionately grave impact on the movement of basic goods and commodities to and from our shores and to our military bases overseas.

In absence of a federal framework for vaccine distribution, we appeal for your assistance in facilitating the distribution of vaccines to approved locations and medical providers for these essential workers who go to sea.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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