



FOR A SAFER STATE

## **ACCESS RESTRICTIONS AT FIRE AND EMERGENCY SITES: COVID-19 DIRECTIONS AND COLLECTION OF VACCINATION STATUS**

As you know, the Chief Health Officer has published [Fire and Emergency Services Worker \(Restrictions on Access\) Directions \(No 2\)](#) that require all fire and emergency services workers, including bush fire brigade volunteers, to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

Our collective focus needs to be on implementing these Directions so we can continue to keep the Western Australian community safe, particularly as Western Australia's border controls are eased, and we transition to living with COVID-19. Fighting COVID-19 is bigger than any individual and it is expected all fire and emergency services workers, including bushfire brigade volunteers will join in this effort by getting vaccinated.

It is critical that DFES and Local Governments continue to work together to get the best outcome for Western Australia.

It is acknowledged that there has been a degree of confusion over Section 8C of the Chief Health Officer's Directions, which allows for an unvaccinated worker or volunteer to respond to an emergency. This clause is not intended to water down the overall objective of the Directions but is about providing a back-up plan in a scenario where there is no other option than to have unvaccinated fire and emergency services workers respond to a life-threatening emergency. It is included in the Directions in the spirit of a Good Samaritan act to recognise that the preservation of human life is always paramount.

Such a scenario may include a farmer, who is an unvaccinated member of a bush fire brigade, receiving a call to a fire close to their property. The unvaccinated farmer arrives at the fire and there are no other brigades in attendance. In order to immediately attempt to extinguish or mitigate the fire before it escalates, the farmer may undertake firefighting activity until vaccinated firefighting persons attend and the fire is brought under control.

If a local Bush Fire Brigade arrives and the captain considers the unvaccinated volunteer is required in the management of the incident, it would be acceptable to keep the unvaccinated volunteer at the incident until it can be controlled. If the brigade arrives and has the capacity to manage the incident, the expectation is that the captain would demobilise the unvaccinated volunteer.

There have also been concerns over the expectation on incident controllers to manage vaccination requirements when a large number of brigades and services are coming together. It is important to note that determining vaccination status is intended to be a pre-event action rather than a requirement for every emergency – it is not intended that volunteers will be required to produce evidence of their vaccination at each incident.

If bush fire brigade captains or leaders develop a record of vaccinated members, they will have acted in good faith to comply with the Directions. It is our understanding that penalties for a lack of compliance would only be applied in circumstances where there is a clear intent to breach the Directions.

DFES has developed a number of options to assist leaders of brigades, groups, units and Local Governments to collect and maintain records of vaccination, with a view to ensuring that the process is as simple as possible for all parties. The attached '*Local Government Bush Fire Brigade volunteers – COVID-19 Vaccination Evidence Options*' flowchart illustrates the options for the collection of vaccination evidence from volunteers.

DFES has asked all volunteers to upload proof of vaccination to the DFES Volunteer Hub and will use this information to provide Local Governments with weekly COVID-19 vaccination status reports from 13 December 2021.

The report will show each brigade name and each volunteer and indicate if they have provided their vaccination status to DFES. All Local Governments are asked to [email reports@dfes.wa.gov.au](mailto:reports@dfes.wa.gov.au) with their preferred email address to receive this report as soon as possible. Local Governments collecting volunteers' proof of vaccination are also requested to provide a regular report to DFES at the above email address. A template that can be used for this purpose is also attached.

Further information on the Directions and COVID-19 vaccinations can be found here:

[COVID-19 Mandatory vaccination information](#)

[Fire and Emergency Services Worker Restrictions on Access Directions - Exemption Guidelines, Temporary Exemption Form and Exemption Form](#)

[Mandatory COVID-19 vaccination FAQs](#)

[Getting proof of COVID-19 vaccinations](#)

We hope this information addresses some of the concerns you may have about the Chief Health Officer's Directions.

DFES and WALGA will continue to liaise closely with Local Governments and volunteers across the State to provide as much information as possible about the Directions.

If you have further questions, please contact WALGA via email at [covid@walga.asn.au](mailto:covid@walga.asn.au) or DFES via email at [COVID19@dfes.wa.gov.au](mailto:COVID19@dfes.wa.gov.au).

Your sincerely



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**Attachment 1:** *Volunteer FAQs (last updated 3 December 2021)*

**Attachment 2:** *Extract from DFES Volunteer Hub – COVID-19 Information Summary*

**Attachment 3:** *Local Government Bush Fire Brigades – COVID-19 Vaccination Evidence Options*