

Washington Education Association Position on COVID-19 Vaccination

The Washington Education Association (WEA) believes that, in addition to existing workplace health and safety requirements, vaccines are an essential medical tool in preventing infectious diseases. The Association acknowledges that vaccines must have widespread availability and use to be effective.

The WEA encourages widespread use of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccinations. Vaccine plans must also ensure equitable access to vaccines in rural, and isolated communities and prioritize educators. The State Department of Health, OSPI, and the Governor's Office must assist in getting a sufficient supply of vaccine to school districts to ensure all current school district employees who are working in-person with students have the option of receiving the vaccine immediately. Before more educators are ordered back to in-person services, every employee must be given access to vaccine shot #1 and shot #2 before resuming in-person services and instruction. We urge the Washington State Department of Health and governmental agencies at the county and municipal levels to use consistent and transparent communications on the benefits and safety of vaccines.

WEA members play a crucial role in providing educational services to students and their families through in-person and remote instruction. WEA believes that all school employees - classified, certificated, full time, part time, and substitutes, including PK-12 and higher ed professionals and those training to be the same - should receive priority access to COVID-19 vaccines because of the importance of safe, equitable, and effective instruction and support.

We recognize that the intersectionality of racial, social, and economic inequities have been made exponentially worse due to the disproportionate impact the pandemic has had on communities of color. In addition, the historical abuses that have occurred in the past may cause resistance to vaccinations¹. WEA calls upon the Washington State DOH to create a vaccine distribution plan and evidence-based vaccination campaign that specifically addresses the disproportionate suffering in communities of color and accounts for vaccine hesitancy based on historical and current abuses and exploitation of communities of color.

While waiting for equitable access to vaccines, school districts must honor their commitments to equity and anti-racism by identifying what opportunity gaps have increased or been created during the last 9 months of the pandemic.

Lastly, however effective, and widely used COVID-19 vaccines are, mitigation measures to reduce the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 will continue to be crucial while the efficacy and safety of the COVID-19 vaccine for use in children is studied. In addition, the full effect of vaccines on transmission and reinfection is not yet clear. Therefore, ensuring the health and safety of the entire school community means that strict adherence to current workplace health and safety requirements must remain a top priority.

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/12/15/years-medical-abuse-make-black-americans-less-likely-trust-covid-vaccine/>