

Vaccinations explained at Tuesday town hall

By Tribune staff

The Fort Sill Facebook live town hall discussion Jan. 19 focused on the COVID-19 vaccination. Post leaders provided detailed information about the vaccination schedule, peoples' eligibility, and availability.

The Number 1 priority here remains the life, health, and safety of the community, said Maj. Gen. Ken Kamper, Fires Center of Excellence and Fort Sill commanding general, in his welcome. He urged viewers to continue to practice the three W's: **wearing facemasks when required; watching physical distancing; and washing hands.**

Fort Sill's active daily COVID case rate is 200 cases lower today than it was during the November town hall meeting, the general said. "That's good news, although we still have over **350 active cases.**"

He noted that there was not a spike in COVID after the holiday block leave.

The installation received a number of vaccines Jan. 14. Joe Gallagher, FCoE and Fort Sill civilian deputy to the CG, said "the command has **full confidence in the safety and efficacy of the vaccine.**" He urged people who are undecided about getting the vaccine to make informed decisions by talking with healthcare providers.

Fort Sill is following the DoD prioritization for administering the vaccine, Gallagher said.

The **first tier** of vaccine recipients are first responders and healthcare workers. Thus far 350 of those people have received the vaccine.

The **next tier** are units that have Soldiers who will be deploying soon, Gallagher said. That should be happening this week.

The **first broad group** of employees to get the vaccine will be the critical national capabilities and other essential workers, Gallagher said. This includes those who work in the missions for ba-

sic combat training, advanced individual training, etc.; Child and Youth Services; dining facility employees, and *many* more.

"The (vaccines) that we have on hand will get us about two-thirds of the way of the three groups I just described," Gallagher said.

After that, the next tier is the **high-risk beneficiaries followed by the general population.**

The process will take a few months and depends on how many and how often the post receives vaccines, Gallagher said.

Col. David Zinnante, Fort Sill Medical Department Activity commander also encouraged people to get the vaccine. "Many people are apprehensive about the vaccine. I'd be much more apprehensive about the COVID-19 disease itself, than I would be about the vaccine.

"We really have an opportunity to get ahead of this, and put a stop to what's been going on the past year," the colonel said.

Responding to queries, Zinnante said the **vaccine is not mandatory** for DoD service members because it is an emergency-use vaccine. Yes, people should still **get the flu shot.** Military **retirees** will eventually be able to get the vaccine here.

The vaccine is **not for children**, Zinnante said. The Pfizer vaccine is for people 16-years-old and older; for Moderna it's 18 and older.

How long is the protection period of the vaccine? "We don't know," Zinnante said. "We hope we will get at least a year, potentially two."

Kamper added the vaccination pace should pick up here in February and March, and expects it to be widely available by summer.

Other topics

The **Army Maintenance Application** (ArMA) came online Jan. 19, said Fort Sill Garrison Command Sgt. Maj. Russell Blackwell.

The ArMA app, available through the Digital Garrison app, is a way for

Soldiers to put in barracks maintenance requests directly to the Directorate of Public Works.

The Soldier's leadership is CC'd on work order requests, photos can be attached, and the request can be tracked. ArMA provides a direct conversation between the Soldier and DPW, Blackwell said.

FCoE and Fort Sill Command Sgt. Maj. Stephen Burnley added that the **Digital Garrison app** provides useful information about Fort Sill, including gate hours, a newcomer's guide, installation directory, and more. It's a dynamic document that welcomes user feedback.

Burnley encouraged post residents to complete the **DoD housing survey**, which runs through January.

Kamper said that the earliest **large formal balls** may resume might be the summer, maybe even the fall. The same is true of open graduations. Graduations continue to be livestreamed.

Col. Rhett Taylor, Fort Sill Garrison commander, said the **Main Exchange Food Court** will continue to be closed for seated dining for the foreseeable future as a pandemic precaution.

Some viewers had questions specific to their Soldiers in BCT, and AIT. Burnley advised them to **direct message** their Soldier's battalion or brigade on Facebook with their concerns. Kamper also suggested viewing the **BCT/AIT Facebook live town hall** sessions scheduled for Jan. 28, Feb. 11 and 25; and March 11 and 25, all at 11 a.m.

Burnley noted this is **Blood Donor Month** and encouraged people to donate.

Closing, Gallagher again encouraged people to get the vaccine. "The sooner we get everyone vaccinated, the sooner we can get back to a little bit more normal."

The next FCoE Town Hall will be Feb. 16, at 6 p.m.

Federal labor union office moves to Craig Road

Story, photo
By Marie Pihulic

The motto of the labor union is "Mission first."

If Fort Sill federal civilian employees believe their ability to do the mission is being hindered, they can seek help from the National Federation of Federal Employees Local 273 at its new location in Building 2870 Craig Road.

"If management does something that they shouldn't have done, or an employee thinks they shouldn't have done, they can come in here and file a grievance," said John Roche, NFFE 273 chief steward.

Roche said most grievances come from miscommunications, or in the form of a supervisor trying to punish an employee with too much severity.

The union has a collective bargaining unit with Fort Sill stating whatever alleged offense was committed by the employee, they must receive the lowest form of punishment for it.

"We are all humans so we do make mistakes," said Roche.

He gave an example of a civilian worker on post who has been

employed for 10 years receiving high evaluations and cash awards for great job performance.

"All of a sudden a trainee made a complaint against him and they were looking to do a 14-day suspension. You're trying to go from zero to 100. That just isn't right," said Roche.

If a grievance is not settled and has to go to mediation, or arbitration, that can be handled by the union only if the employee is a dues-paying union member.

Union dues are \$29 per pay period.

"As I explain to people, if you have a house, you have house insurance; if you have a vehicle, you have insurance on your vehicle; but why don't you have insurance on yourself?"

"How are you going to keep living in that house without a job? How are you going to keep making payments for that vehicle without a job? The one thing you're overlooking is you, the money maker, the one that's buying all these toys," said Roche.

He said in his time as steward, there have been a few instances where employees had letters of termination from their positions and



The National Federation of Federal Employees Local 273 is now in Building 2870 Craig Road here.

he was able to adjust the punishment so they could keep their jobs.

Roche said the best thing to do is to come to the union before problems ever become that large.

He looks over grievances and discusses a way ahead with the employee before meeting with the supervisor and any other parties involved.

He said although he is bargaining for the employee, supervisors do have rights as well and his goal is to satisfy both parties and settle grievances with the lowest form of punishment that is applicable.

An example of this was a case where a supervisor believed his or her employee had an anger management issue.

"The supervisor was going to put a counseling statement into the employee's folder. The

employee was a union member, came in, and we had a meeting.

"I sat down with management, (Civilian Personnel Advisory Counsel), and the union member and I said 'I'll meet you halfway.

"We'll do a 90-day letter of concern, that way you have your paper trail, and in return the union member is willing to go to the Employee Assistance Program for a maximum of two meetings to see if there is an anger management issue.

"If there is, then the employee will seek help for it. It took less than five minutes for everyone to come to agreement," said Roche.

He said there are times where he will advise an employee to go to Equal Employment Opportunity instead if he believes they will have a stronger case with EEO.

But, he said once an employee begins a case with EEO, they cannot switch to the union for that particular grievance.

Roche said it is as easy as giving them a call to find out the best route to move forward.

There are also Weingarten rights an employee can use if they believe they need union representation.

"If a supervisor calls you into the office and says you've been kind of messing up and here's your writeup, you can say, 'I'm invoking my Weingarten rights,' and everything stops because you're asking for representation under Weingarten.

"It's kind of like if you hire a lawyer except it doesn't cost you anything," said Roche.

The National Federation of Federal Employees falls under the International Aeronau-

tical and Machinist Union.

The IAM covers employees who build things for the military. Roche said they have strength in numbers, and because of this they have a bar-certified attorney if a union grievance has to go to court.

There are other perks of being a union member to include AFLAC insurance which will cover employees if they are hurt on the job or outside of the job.

They also offer dental and vision programs as well as life insurance.

"Not many people realize, as you get older your rates go up and your benefits go down. With our insurance, it's based on age. Of course the younger you are the less you pay, but once you sign up that rate is locked in. It never ever changes," said Roche.

Another added perk is the opportunity to get a two-year online degree for free for the union member and anyone who lives in their household from an accredited program.

Roche said currently the NFFE 273 has 1,700 members on post.

For more information, call 580-442-2412/5333 or stop by Bldg. 2870 Craig Road.

Jessica Tackaberry

Contributing journalist

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