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Truck drivers need to be in line for vaccine

To ensure continuity in the supply chain, the road freight industry needs to know when truck drivers will receive the COVID-19 vaccine, says Road Transport Forum chief executive Nick Leggett.

Leggett wrote to Covid-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins in January, to enquire about COVID-19 vaccination prioritisation that Government will be using to determine workers in essential industries.

“The trucking industry is keen to understand when its frontline workers (mainly drivers) might be in line for a vaccination and whether they will be given priority over the general population, given their importance in keeping the supply chain running,” Leggett says.

“We see increasing urgency in getting truck drivers vaccinated when you note what is happening in Auckland, our largest city and home to our major port. The yo-yoing lockdowns have significant impacts on moving freight and COVID outbreaks in Auckland put a large workforce at risk.

“Ports of Auckland and other port workers are being vaccinated and it is only a matter of time before high-risk businesses start demanding any workers to their sites also be vaccinated.

“The RTF has asked the Minister to consider the driver workforce as a priority due to the work they undertake.

“Transport operators are keen to mitigate risk and exposure of their employees to COVID-19 as soon as possible and some clarity on vaccination prioritisation would be useful so they can plan.

“We have also asked for legal clarification around employers being able to require their staff to be vaccinated.

“This could emerge as an issue in New Zealand and we think it is especially relevant for both employers and employees in critical industries to understand where the law sits on this point.

“We recognise that the Government will not achieve a 100% vaccination rate, but it will be important to have frontline and critical staff vaccinated and we would like to be able to inform transport operators of their responsibilities and

rights around employee vaccination requirements as soon as possible,” Leggett says.

For more information contact:

**Josie Vidal, RTF manager communications & government relations
Mob: 022 092 9353**

About Road Transport Forum New Zealand (RTF)

RTF provides unified national representation for several regional trucking associations. RTF members include Road Transport Association NZ, National Road Carriers, and NZ Trucking Association. The affiliated representation of the RTF is about 3,000 individual road transport companies which in turn, operate 16-18,000 trucks involved in road freight transport, as well as companies that provide services allied to road freight transport.

The road freight transport industry employs 32,868 people (2.0% of the workforce), has a gross annual turnover of \$6 billion, and transports 93% of the total tonnes of freight moved in New Zealand.