

Civil Defence frontliners 'need jabs now'

■ Twelve ambulance drivers face increased risk

■ Transporting elderly for Covid vaccination

FRUSTRATION IS growing among Kerry's Civil Defence volunteers this week as they anxiously await news of when they'll be administered the life-saving vaccine.

BY MICHAEL AHERN

A dozen core Civil Defence volunteers across Kerry are expecting their first jab in March - as the HSE ramps up the roll-out of vaccinations across two centres in Tralee and Killarney.

But as they continue putting themselves at risk by transporting vulnerable people for essential medical journeys, they're yet to find out when they themselves will be vaccinated.

Civil Defence Officer Tom Brosnan says: "The risk of infection for volunteers will escalate as we transport more people to centres to be vaccinated.

"Volunteers are supporting HSE staff and have the

same professionalism as them," he said.

"I'm dealing with volunteers with no final word on when they'll be vaccinated and they've been at this since last March.

"There are up to 170 volunteers and we're only looking for the 12 core volunteers, who drive the six ambulances, to be vaccinated.

"And that's not including myself," said Mr Brosnan.

The volunteers have been busy this week transporting elderly people from a nursing home in Killarney to their local vaccination centre at Killarney Sports and Leisure Centre.

Meanwhile, they managed to hand out more than 300 sand bags ahead of last



week's floods that washed through South Kerry, while maintaining their transport service for people requiring testing at Ballymullen Barracks in Tralee.

And after each journey, the ambulance needs to be completely disinfected and aired, taking several hours each time.

Mr Brosnan says they're in a similar position to volunteers at The Order of Malta or Irish Red Cross, whom the Government haven't yet prioritised for the vaccine.

"The risks are getting higher because we are bringing people to the vaccination centres," he

VOLUNTEERS: Members of the Civil Defence in Tralee doing a deep clean of their ambulance, pictured in front Tom Brosnan (Civil Defence Officer) with back l-r: Paul Baynham and Aaron Williams.

explained.

"These volunteers are not vaccinated before going to pick up a patient and they don't know whether they are positive or negative. They're doing this all the time.

"It's up to the HSE when we are vaccinated, but we are fighting our corner, the paperwork has been sent away and they're now hoping to get a date for their vaccinations over the coming weeks," he said.