

# Civil Defence volunteers demand vaccines

## Frontline volunteers 'deserve better protection'

A DOZEN Civil Defence volunteers in Kerry are urging the HSE to prioritise them sooner for the life-saving Covid-19 vaccine.

BY MICHAEL AHERN

At present, people in long-term care facilities are being prioritised for the vaccine, along with frontline health-care workers.

However, Civil Defence Officer Tom Brosnan says that frontline volunteers deserve better protection from the Government - as they continue putting themselves at risk to provide essential care to vulnerable people while also conducting vital transport to stranded frontline workers and cancer patients going for treatment in Cork.

Mr Brosnan told *Kerry's Eye*: "We are trying to get vaccinated sooner because we are dealing with Covid-19 patients everyday. We're still fighting our case.

"Of the 30 active volunteers,

I have submitted 12 names to the HSE for consideration.

"Kerry Civil Defence, The Order of Malta or Irish Red Cross don't seem to be regarded by the HSE as frontline workers, even though we do frontline work.

"We are out everyday, we are bringing essential staff to work during bad weather.

"We're asking for more clarity - don't forget the volunteers on the frontline because they are doing this out of their own good nature and they deserve protection."

Mr Brosnan, who is employed full-time by Kerry County Council, says the HSE are doing good work on the rollout of the vaccine, but that progress to date has been 'slow'.

At present, Kerry Civil Defence have two ambulances deployed to transport people



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

to and from Ballymullen Barracks in Tralee for Covid-19 testing, and another two ambulances deployed for general transportation - for example, carrying people to and from Cork for cancer treatment.

Meanwhile, a fifth ambulance is kept in reserve.

Kerry Civil Defence has

about 120 volunteers in total, of which about 30 are currently active.

Many are impacted by the ongoing closure of schools and other Covid-19 restrictions that limit their ability to work as volunteers.

"They are all volunteers and they all do vital work,"

explained Mr Brosnan.

He said: "We are disinfecting the ambulances after each journey. We treat each patient as if they have Covid-19.

"You're talking about a good hour in total, and we then leave the windows open for about two hours before parking the ambulance."

The main office for Kerry Civil Defence is located behind the Tralee Fire Station, while two warehouses are situated at nearby Monavally.

Ambulances in Tralee service communities in Dingle, Castleisland, Killorglin and North Kerry.

Meanwhile in Killamee, two jeeps and a crew cab cover the remaining parts of the county such as Kenmare and Cahersiveen.

He says that getting to people in more remote locations during bad weather can be an issue, but that these dedicated volunteers always find a way.

"The icy conditions affected us, the main roads were fine but on some of the backroads, we had to use the jeeps," stated Mr Brosnan.

He said: "With the elderly, some don't know their Eir-codes and we might not know that particular area.

Mr Brosnan added: "I'm not looking to be too critical of the HSE, I'm just asking them not to forget the frontline volunteers."