

Project Firefighter (PFF) and Forest Fire Operations Officers (FFOO) Frequently Asked Questions

Medical conditions that may preclude an individual from a PFF/FFOO role:

Insulin treated diabetes - Diabetes may affect an emergency worker's ability to perform duties safely and effectively, either through altered or loss of consciousness during a hypoglycaemic episode, or from secondary complications, including eye, heart and kidney problems. Irregularity of meals and sleep, dehydration, high physical demands may all impact of diabetic control. Individuals who require insulin to control diabetes have additional challenges including storage and administration of insulin. There are also safety considerations in respect of co-workers and the work environment should an individual experience a hypoglycaemic episode on the fire ground. **As such, new PFF or FFOO applicants who require insulin for treatment of diabetes are precluded from Category A-C roles.**

Current Asthma - Conditions such as asthma can be aggravated by exposure to the respiratory irritants encountered in the course of operational duties in firefighting/emergency roles. Bushfire smoke is known to include very small particles that are breathed into the very smallest airways and are associated with acute asthma, even in those individuals whose asthma appears well controlled on preventer inhalers (as seen in "thunderstorm asthma" in recent years. Acute asthma may result in sudden incapacity that is a risk to the health safety and wellbeing of the fire-fighter/emergency worker and their colleagues who may be required to assist. Emergency evacuation in the potentially unpredictable environment of a bush fire may not be immediately available. **As such, individuals who require the use of inhalers (relievers and/or preventers), preventer medication, and/or have intermittent current symptoms and/or lung function testing below the medical standard referred to by DELWP, are precluded from Category A-C roles.**

Allergies/Anaphylaxis - any individual advised by their treating doctor to carry an EpiPen for Flora or Fauna allergy will not be considered suitable for Category A-B firefighting/emergency roles.

Warfarin/newer anticoagulants - Individuals requiring treatment by anticoagulant medications are at risk of uncontrolled bleeding despite good anticoagulation control and as such, in an uncontrolled physical environment, with risk of falling branches, or tripping on uneven ground when visibility is poor, an individual on warfarin who sustains a minor head injury may develop a severe bleed into the brain, or a simple fracture may lead to bleeding resulting increased pressure within a muscle compartment of the arm or leg. Emergency evacuation may not be immediately possible. **As such, an individual requiring warfarin or the newer anticoagulant medications are excluded from Category A-C roles.**

FAQs:

1. Will Type 2 diabetes (which is not treated with medication) preclude an individual from a PFF or FFOO position (A or B)?

Diet controlled diabetes would not preclude any individual from meeting the requirements for a PFF or FFOO (Category A or B) role.

There would however be consideration as to whether there are any diabetic related complications (unlikely in a diet controlled diabetic) and whether there is any medical condition that has led to the diabetes or a related complication. For example, if an individual is significantly overweight which has led to the diabetes, and the weight issue has also led to other conditions such as sleep apnoea/hypertension etc.

Individuals who require medication (other than insulin) for control of diabetes will be individually risk assessed however, will not necessarily be precluded from a Category A-C role.

2. If an individual wears spectacles, what are the minimum standards required for a PFF or FFOO position?

Spectacle use is acceptable for PFFs or FFOOs. However, as spectacles may potentially be dislodged during firefighting/emergency activities, the visual acuity requirement is at least 6/36, with both eyes, without glasses.

However, the vision with and without glasses is required to meet a minimum standard. Additionally, the examining doctor will need to consider if there are any related medical conditions (e.g., are the glasses required because of another condition).

3. If an individual is colour blind / colour deficiency, would this preclude them from a PFF or FFOO role?

No colour deficiency will discriminate or preclude you against an A and/or B category.

4. If an individual takes a blood pressure medication daily, is the minimum standards that are required to be met for a PFF or FFOO?

Taking medication for blood pressure is acceptable for PFFs or FFOOs- there are many firefighters operating who are taking medication for their blood pressure. The individual's blood pressure however is required to be well controlled. Additionally, the examining doctor will consider whether or not there are any related medical conditions (e.g., is the BP secondary to another health condition, or are there any complications related to the raised BP).

5. If an individual had childhood asthma and no longer has asthma, does not take any medication or have any symptoms, what information would the individual be required to provide to prove this?

Specifically, for the role as a firefighter (Category A-C), anyone with a history of childhood asthma will require:

- a normal lung function test at the medical (please do not use any inhalers for several hours prior to the test)
- a normal chest examination
- to be free of asthma symptoms and medication/inhaler use (if you prefer to obtain a letter from your GP outlining when you last required treatment for asthma, that would be helpful).

If these are all acceptable then there would be no preclusion for individuals who had asthma in childhood.

6. If an individual had childhood asthma and underwent a Bronchial provocation test (BPT) previously (as part of the medical assessment process), are they required to undertake another test?

If the individual has undertaken a BPT in the past, there is no need to undertake a new one as long as no new symptoms or medication are required.

7. If an individual has an allergy and is required to carry an EpiPen, will that rule them out to work on the fire line?

If an individual is required to carry an EpiPen on them at all times due to risk of anaphylaxis from flora and fauna, then they would not be considered suitable for an emergency Category A-B role. Further assessment may be required for a Category C-G role.

Individuals who carry an EpiPen for food allergies require a case-by-case assessment and information may be required from an allergy specialist.

8. If an individual is on warfarin or the newer anticoagulants, what is the highest classification they can receive?

An individual who is on warfarin or the newer anticoagulants is not suitable for A, B or C roles, and the highest category they can potentially achieve is an E, depending on an individual risk assessment.