

July 21, 2021

AHA Issues Policy Statement on COVID-19 Vaccination Policies for Health Care Workers

The Issue

At Issue

America's hospitals and health systems are committed to protecting the health and well-being of health care personnel and the patients and communities that they serve. The remarkable achievement of having three safe, highly effective and readily available COVID-19 vaccines has provided our nation with its most potent tool yet to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic. For health care personnel, the COVID-19 vaccines are especially important because they not only confer strong protection against the disease to vaccinated individuals, but also reduce significantly the likelihood of spreading COVID-19 to patients and/or co-workers. This is especially important given the medically vulnerable populations that hospitals serve.

In the eight months since the first COVID-19 vaccines were authorized for emergency use by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), hospitals and health systems have worked diligently with their workforce to share the facts about the vaccines, encourage them to get vaccinated, and, in many cases, administer the vaccines directly to patients and members of the public.

However, the mounting evidence of vaccine safety and efficacy – along with the potentially severe threat that new COVID-19 variants may pose to unvaccinated individuals – has prompted America's hospitals to redouble their efforts to ensure as many of their staff as possible are vaccinated. In many cases, hospitals are considering – or have implemented – mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policies for their workforce.

Our Take

The AHA Board of Trustees today approved a policy statement (included at the end of this Advisory) that strongly urges the vaccination of all health care personnel. The AHA also supports hospitals and health systems that adopt mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policies, with local factors and circumstances shaping whether and how mandatory policies are

Key Takeaways

- AHA strongly urges the vaccination of all health care personnel against COVID-19 to protect against the disease's known and substantial risks.
- AHA supports hospitals and health systems that adopt mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policies for health care personnel, with local factors and circumstances shaping whether and how these policies are implemented.
- AHA encourages organizations with mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policies to adopt practices such as:
 - Medical exemptions and accommodations for deeply held religious beliefs;
 - Education about COVID-19 vaccine safety and efficacy to encourage voluntary vaccination;
 - Scheduling flexibility and/or time off to enable staff to get vaccinated and recover from possible side effects.

implemented. The policy statement will be shared with AHA members, the media, policymakers and other interested members of the public.

What You Can Do

- ✓ Share this Advisory with your senior clinical, quality, human resources, occupational health, legal, communications and other key leaders.
- ✓ Review your organization's progress in vaccinating your workforce, and assess whether a mandatory policy would be of benefit.
- ✓ Consult with your compliance and/or legal teams to assess whether there are any state-level laws that may constrain implementation of a mandatory policy.

Further Questions

Please contact Nancy Foster, vice president of quality and safety policy, at nfoster@aha.org, or Akin Demehin, director of policy, at ademehin@aha.org.

**American Hospital Association Policy Statement on
Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination of Health Care Personnel
Approved by the Board of Trustees
July 21, 2021**

America's hospitals and health systems are committed to protecting the health and well-being of health care personnel and the patients and communities that they serve. The best available scientific evidence indicates that:

- COVID-19 vaccinations are safe.
- COVID-19 vaccinations are effective at reducing both the risk of becoming infected and spreading the infection to others.
- COVID-19 has a significant risk of transmission both before the onset of symptoms and in the absence of symptoms. These risks are substantially higher among unvaccinated individuals.
- Among unvaccinated individuals, COVID-19 infections pose a substantial risk of severe illness and death and may lead to long-term adverse impacts to health. These risks are higher among those individuals with certain underlying health conditions, like many patients in hospitals or who are seen in hospital-based ambulatory settings.

To protect all patients, communities and personnel from the known and substantial risks of COVID-19, the American Hospital Association (AHA) strongly urges the vaccination of all health care personnel. COVID-19 vaccines protect health care personnel when working both in health care facilities and in the community. They provide strong protection against workers unintentionally carrying the disease to work and spreading it to patients and peers.

The AHA also supports hospitals and health systems that adopt mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policies for health care personnel, with local factors and circumstances shaping whether and how these policies are implemented. The AHA encourages hospitals and health systems implementing mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policies to:

- Provide exemptions for medical reasons and accommodations consistent with Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines (e.g., a sincerely held religious belief, practice or observance);
- Follow relevant Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) infection control guidelines, Occupational Safety and Health Administration requirements, and other federal and state regulations regarding use of personal protective equipment and other infection control practices for unvaccinated staff receiving an exemption or accommodation. For example, unvaccinated personnel may be required to wear a mask at all times even if CDC guidelines and OSHA requirements were to relax mask requirements for vaccinated personnel;
- Ensure the policy is implemented in a manner consistent with local and state laws;
- Follow requirements and guidelines from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and CDC on which individuals are eligible and should be prioritized for vaccination;
- Monitor national safety and efficacy data for all FDA authorized or approved vaccines in use;
- Continue providing education about the efficacy and safety of COVID-19 vaccines to encourage staff to obtain the vaccine voluntarily; and
- Offer scheduling flexibility and/or time off to ensure personnel have time to obtain the vaccine and recover from its possible side effects.