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COVID Vaccines Mandated for Healthcare Workers and those at Philly Colleges and University

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August 13, 2021 | James Garrow
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As the City continues to respond to COVID-19 and works to forestall the huge wave of cases and hospitalizations that other states have seen, the Philadelphia Board of Health voted to approve a new Regulation intended to help fight the pandemic.

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Starting on October 15th, all healthcare workers in the City of Philadelphia will be required to be vaccinated against COVID-19 unless they have a religious or medical exemption.

All staff, students, and faculty at colleges and universities in the city will also be required to be vaccinated against COVID-19 unless they have a religious or medical exemption.

Healthcare workers have been Philadelphia heroes throughout the pandemic, and it's important that we protect them from hospitalization and death. Given that many healthcare workers, including those in nursing homes and long-term care facilities, work with our most vulnerable loved ones, they need all the protection they can get. By protecting them, we protect our most vulnerable as well.

Vaccination rates in Philadelphia are the lowest in our younger folks and coincidentally, those are the folks with the highest rates of COVID infection these days. It's important that we do everything we can to cut that infection rate. Previous waves of the pandemic have shown us how quickly this virus can spread through college campuses; getting everyone vaccinated will help keep that from happening again.

Many healthcare settings, colleges, and universities have already begun instituting vaccine mandates, and we applaud them all. The Board's Regulation will ensure that our heroes, our most vulnerable, and our future are protected.

Questions and answers about the Board's Regulation

Q: NYC and other jurisdictions have implemented a vaccine mandate for restaurants, bars, and other indoor entertainment venues. Why has Philadelphia not done that?

A: We are implementing mandates based on who is most at risk and who is most likely to spread COVID-19. While we may need to move to additional mandates or other strategies, we believe that the mandates announced this week are a logical next step.

Q: What types of accommodations are available for students and healthcare workers that get exemptions from the vaccine mandate? How will you keep them safe?

A: Healthcare workers with an exemption will be required to have a PCR test or an antigen test twice per week. Colleges and universities will be required to offer one or more of these accommodations to those with exemption:

1. PCR testing once per week or antigen testing twice per week, or
2. Those colleges and universities with 90% or more of their population vaccinated could choose to offer those with exemptions the option of double masking and keeping at least 6 feet of social distance in indoor public spaces, or
3. If feasible, colleges and universities may choose to offer those with exemptions a virtual option as their accommodation.

Q: In healthcare settings, do hospital gift shop workers or cafeteria staff who may be in contact with a patient but who aren't strictly healthcare workers need to be vaccinated? How will penalization be handled?

A: Yes, they will need to be vaccinated. Many COVID outbreaks in healthcare institutions have started with workers in the institutions who don't have direct patient care and then spread to those who do and subsequently patients. If they don't have exemptions by October 15, they will have to be tested twice weekly.

Q: Are contractors on college and university campuses covered by these mandates?

A: Yes they are, but the contracting agencies will be responsible for maintaining vaccination and testing records.

Q: Is wearing two masks as effective as being vaccinated?

A: Being fully vaccinated can reduce your risk of being infected eight-fold and reduce your chances of hospitalization by 25-fold. It's the Health Department's goal that everyone in Philadelphia be vaccinated against COVID. For people who cannot be vaccinated or who are not fully vaccinated yet, double-masking can reduce their chances of being infected almost as well as an N-95 mask but does nothing to reduce the severity of the disease if they are infected.

Q: Is it fair that people who want an exemption from these mandates must pay to see a doctor?

A: While many people may want a medical exemption so they don't need to receive a COVID vaccine, medical exemptions should only be used for people that truly cannot receive the COVID vaccine. The vast majority of people in Philadelphia will not require a medical exemption. The Health Department strongly believes that being fully vaccinated is the best way to protect yourself and the people around you from severe COVID infections and to bring this pandemic wave to an end.

Q: Where can healthcare providers learn more about the City's vaccine mandate?

A: On August 25, 2021, the Division of Disease Control issued a **Health Alert message that described the new mandate**, who it applies to, how it is to be implemented, and several questions pertinent to this population. The Health Alert can be found on the Health Department's **Health Information Portal**. Providers can find more information about COVID-19 on the **Health Information Portal's novel coronavirus page**.

→ Learn all about the City's response to the COVID pandemic

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