

## **Indian Health Service QA on COVID-19 Vaccine Requirement**

### **Who is included in the COVID-19 vaccine requirement?**

All IHS employees, U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps officers, contract staff, temporary employees, students, and volunteers who work, visit for official duties or provide direct care in a federally-operated IHS health care facility will have until October 1, 2021, to receive two doses of COVID-19 vaccine in a two-dose series, or one dose of COVID-19 vaccine in a single-dose. Limited exemptions apply to those who have a valid medical or religious exemption on file.

Federal IHS employees assigned to tribal and urban Indian organization programs will also be required to be vaccinated if the tribal or urban Indian organization has a mandatory vaccine policy for its employees.

### **Who are considered “health care personnel”?**

Health care personnel refers to all paid and unpaid persons serving in health care settings who have the potential for direct or indirect exposure to patients. This will include all people working in facilities where patients are seen, including administrative and support staff.

### **Will health care personnel who do not usually work in a health care setting but are visiting for official duties be required to be vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Yes, health care personnel who visit health care facilities for official duties will be required to be vaccinated. They will indicate proof the same way those who work in health care settings do. If they are not vaccinated due to medical or religious exemption from vaccination they will be required to wear a mask at all times while onsite and be required to test.

### **Does this apply to U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps officers at IHS?**

Yes. The Surgeon General is also requiring members of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps be vaccinated against COVID-19 as part of medical readiness procedures to prepare for any potential deployment needs as emergency responders.

### **Do federal employees at tribal and urban Indian organization facilities have to be vaccinated?**

Yes, if the tribal or urban Indian organization has a mandatory vaccine policy for its employees.

### **Are there any exceptions/exemptions?**

Limited exemptions apply to those who have a valid medical or religious exemption on file.

### **Will those who are exempt be required to be tested? How often?**

Yes, individuals with a medical or religious exemption from vaccination will be required to wear a mask at all times while onsite and in the workplace, and to take any other necessary precautions, including required testing, as determined by the clinical director at the facility that the employee is assigned. Frequency of testing will be determined by the service unit clinical director.

### **How much time do individuals have to get vaccinated?**

Employees must receive two doses of COVID-19 vaccine in a two-dose series, or one dose of COVID-19 vaccine in a single-dose by October 1, 2021.

**How will the requirement be enforced? Will employees have to show proof of vaccination?**

Compliance with the COVID-19 vaccine requirement will be overseen by the federally-operated service unit or office where the employee is assigned. Acceptable documentation will include a COVID-19 vaccine administered by IHS or in an IHS facility and recorded in the employee's health record. If vaccine is given outside the IHS, then they would need a vaccination card that documents their name, date of vaccination, product name/manufacturer, lot number, healthcare professional or clinic site.

**Who will enforce the requirement if the employee is assigned to a tribally-operated facility?**

IHS employees working for a tribal or urban Indian organization will follow the vaccine policy and requirements for that tribal or urban organization.

**What is the current vaccination rate for IHS employees?**

The IHS is currently collecting this information from each IHS facility. For IHS Areas that have reported to date, vaccination rates for each IHS area is between 78 and 90 percent.

**Does the requirement differ from other federal agencies? If so, how?**

This requirement for the IHS health care work force is more comprehensive than what President Biden announced recently for all federal employees. The IHS policy for health care personnel allows exceptions only for medical or religious reasons.

**Will all IHS employees be held to the same standard (admin vs front line/providers)?**

The policy applies to all employees working in facilities where patients are seen. This policy does not apply to employees at office locations where patient care is not provided such as IHS Area Offices. These non-patient care locations continue to operate on maximum telework status. However, if they plan to visit health care facilities for official duties, they will be required to be vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine. They will indicate proof the same way those who work in health care settings do. If they are not vaccinated due to medical or religious exemption from vaccination they will be required to wear a mask at all times while onsite and be required to test.

**How does this requirement impact tribal health programs?**

Tribal and urban Indian organizations programs will continue to set policy for their employees. IHS employees working for a tribal or urban Indian organization will follow the vaccine policy for that organization's employees.