

California to require vaccine or testing for state workers

July 26 2021, by Kathleen Ronayne and Janie Har



Carlos Arrendondo arrives for his appointment to get vaccinated, as banners advertise the availability of the Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines at a county-run vaccination site at the Eugene A. Obregon Park in Los Angeles Thursday, July 22, 2021. The top health official in Los Angeles County on Thursday implored residents to get vaccinated as the region experiences a coronavirus surge similar to last summer's. Credit: AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes

California will require millions of health care workers and state employees to show proof of a COVID-19 vaccination or get tested weekly, announcing a broad measure Monday to try to slow rising coronavirus infections in the nation's most populous state, mostly among the unvaccinated.

The new rule, to take effect next month, is the latest example of California and politically [progressive cities nationwide](#) cracking down on a virus that has upended life since March 2020. New York Mayor Bill DeBlasio [announced a similar plan](#) Monday that requires 340,000 city employees, including teachers and police officers, to show proof of vaccination or undergo weekly testing.

Los Angeles County, the nation's most populous, has [reimposed an indoor mask mandate](#), regardless of vaccination status, and San Francisco announced it would require its 35,000 employees to get inoculated, get an exemption or lose their job.

California's order goes even further by dipping into the private sector. Medical professionals applauded Gov. Gavin Newsom's new policy, saying it's legal, ethical and necessary given a national surge driven by the highly contagious delta variant.

"He's really showing leadership to strengthen the case for vaccination, which the entire country is trying to make," said Dr. Monica Gandhi, an infectious diseases professor at the University of California, San Francisco.

The new rule would apply to an estimated 246,000 state employees, according to the governor, and at least 2 million health care workers and long-term care workers in the public and private sectors.

While about 62% of all eligible Californians are fully vaccinated, the

state has struggled to make significant progress in recent weeks. Infections and hospitalizations are rising, with the delta variant now making up an estimated 80% of cases in California, though the growing numbers are still far below the winter peak.

"An individual's choice not to get vaccinated is now impacting the rest of us in a profound and devastating and deadly way," Newsom said, making clear that he wants the private sector to follow his lead.

The Democratic governor has been hesitant to reimpose requirements on mask-wearing or social distancing since he allowed the state to reopen on June 15. The vaccinate-or-test requirement comes as Newsom faces a recall election in September that's largely over his handling of the pandemic. California was the first to impose a statewide stay-at-home order last year, and business and school shutdowns that lasted longer than those in many other states.

"What we need to do in order to keep the public safe is to make sure that we're relying on more than just the honor system," said Dr. Kirsten Bibbins-Domingo, a professor of epidemiology at UC San Francisco. The governor "is signaling that this is the right step to be taking at this particular time."



A private security guard gives directions to people looking to get vaccinated, as banners advertise the availability of the Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines at a county-run vaccination site offering free walk-in with no appointment needed at the Eugene A. Obregon Park in Los Angeles Thursday, July 22, 2021. The top health official in Los Angeles County on Thursday implored residents to get vaccinated as the region experiences a coronavirus surge similar to last summer's. Credit: AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes

On Monday, dozens of national health care organizations released a letter pleading with health care and long-term care home employers to mandate employee vaccinations.

Universities are requiring students and faculty be vaccinated once school

is back in. The San Francisco Bar Owner Alliance on Monday said it will recommend its hundreds of members check for proof of vaccination or a recent negative COVID-19 test result before allowing guests inside.

Santa Clara and San Francisco counties are among those urging private employers to require employees be vaccinated. San Francisco is mandating all 35,000 municipal workers get inoculated as soon as the vaccines receive full approval from the Food and Drug Administration or get an exemption. Santa Clara isn't waiting for full FDA approval to require all 22,000 county employees get vaccinated.

In California, state and health care workers without proof of vaccination will continue to be required to wear masks on the job and undergo once- or twice-a-week testing.

Vaccine verification also will be required in jails, homeless shelters and other places where people congregate, Newsom said. It's not clear who will pay for the tests.

Richard Louis Brown, president of the largest state employee union, said it's still seeking details about the plan. Newsom offered no information about how the requirement might affect the large number of state employees who work from home, said Brown, whose Service Employees International Union Local 1000 has about 96,000 members.

Dr. Jeffrey Klausner, professor of medicine and public health at the University of Southern California, said the announcement will nudge both employers who have been unsure about a vaccine requirement and workers who haven't gotten the shots.

"If the vaccine is required, there's going to be a lot more people who are going to get vaccinated," he said. "They're not necessarily against vaccination—they haven't felt the motivation, and they're not concerned

about getting infected."

But if their boss requires it, "many have said, 'Yes, I will get vaccinated, I'm not going to risk my job,'" Klausner said.

California's secretary of health and human services said those who are eligible but remain unvaccinated is a diverse group. Dr. Mark Ghaly said some people need more information, others have not made it a priority and some will never get the vaccine. Then there are those who are not eligible—children under 12.

"I want to see the unvaccinated people do what's not just right for them, but for their state and community as a whole," he said.

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