US health groups call for vaccine mandates for medical workers

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Hospitals and other health care facilities should require their employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19, a coalition of seven organizations representing medical professionals said Tuesday.

"The COVID-19 vaccines in use in the United States have been shown to be safe and effective," said David Weber, a professor of medicine at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and lead author of the statement.

"By requiring vaccination as a condition of employment we raise levels of vaccination for healthcare personnel, improve protection of our patients, and aid in reaching community protection. As healthcare personnel, we're committed to these goals."

The statement was organized by the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA) and signed by the Infectious Diseases Society of America and five other groups.

It followed an eight-week review of evidence on the three vaccines authorized for use in the United States, [vaccination rates](link), and employment law.

According to a statement by SHEA, research prior to the pandemic showed that rates of routine vaccinations among healthcare providers were suboptimal.

"For flu vaccination, when [healthcare](link) employers instituted policies of influenza vaccination as a condition of employment, compliance rose to 94.4 percent compared to 69.6 percent in organizations without a requirement," it said.

Despite having among the highest supplies of vaccines in the world, the United States is struggling to convince the vaccine- hesitant to roll up their arms.

President Joe Biden had set a goal of at least partly vaccinating 70 percent of adults by July 4, and as of Tuesday, the figure was still only

67.7 percent.

A clear divide has emerged between parts of the country that voted for Biden, which have higher vaccine rates, and regions that voted for former president Donald Trump, which have lower rates.

At the same time, the Delta variant is now causing cases to surge in under vaccinated states, such as Louisiana.

The national seven-day-average of new cases was 21,420 on July 12, up from a 2021 low of 11,462 on June 20.

Deaths are also creeping up, but the rise is not as pronounced: the seven-day-average on July 12 was 194, up from a low of 151 on July 6.

The idea of vaccine mandates has sparked controversy in a nation that cherishes individual liberty, but these concerns need to be weighed against collective wellbeing, Gregory Poland, a professor of medicine and infectious diseases at Mayo Clinic in Minnesota told AFP.

Experts also stress that vaccine mandates have a long history in the United States stretching back all the way to smallpox mass inoculation of George Washington's forces in 1777.

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