# NY to require state employees to get vaccines, or get tested

July 28 2021, by Marina Villeneuve



A registered nurse gives James Mullen the second dose of the coronavirus vaccine at a COVID-19 vaccination site at NYC Health + Hospitals Metropolitan, Thursday, Feb. 18, 2021, in New York. After months of coaxing people to get vaccinated against COVID-19 with incentives like museum tickets and transit passes, New York City is sweetening the pot by offering $100 to any city resident who gets a first dose of a coronavirus vaccine at a city-run site, Mayor Bill de Blasio said Wednesday, July 28, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Mary Altaffer, File

New York will require state employees to get vaccinated against the coronavirus by Labor Day or undergo weekly tests for COVID-19, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Wednesday.

"It's smart, it's fair and it's in everyone's interest," Cuomo said in a Zoom call with the nonprofit Association for a Better New York.

In mandating either the shots, or frequent testing for government workers, Cuomo is following on the heels of California and New York City, which announced similar policies for employees earlier this week. The governor called on local governments across New York to follow suit.

New York, like other states, has seen a rising number of coronavirus cases linked to the delta variant: New infections have climbed 150% and hospitalizations have jumped 69% over the past two weeks.

"What we're seeing is a pandemic among those unvaccinated people, but it affects everyone," Cuomo said.

Cuomo said COVID-19 vaccines would be mandatory for "patient-facing" workers at state-owned hospitals and veterans homes. Those employees would not be able to avoid inoculations by undergoing weekly virus testing. The state runs large hospitals in Syracuse and New York City and on Long Island.

New York is the first state to mandate COVID-19 vaccinations for state-run hospital workers without allowing them to opt out with testing.

New York state regulations already require hospital workers to be vaccinated against measles and rubella.

The Cuomo administration said about 130,000 state employees would be affected. Cuomo's office did not immediately respond to questions about who will pay for testing for unvaccinated workers and potential penalties for unwilling workers.
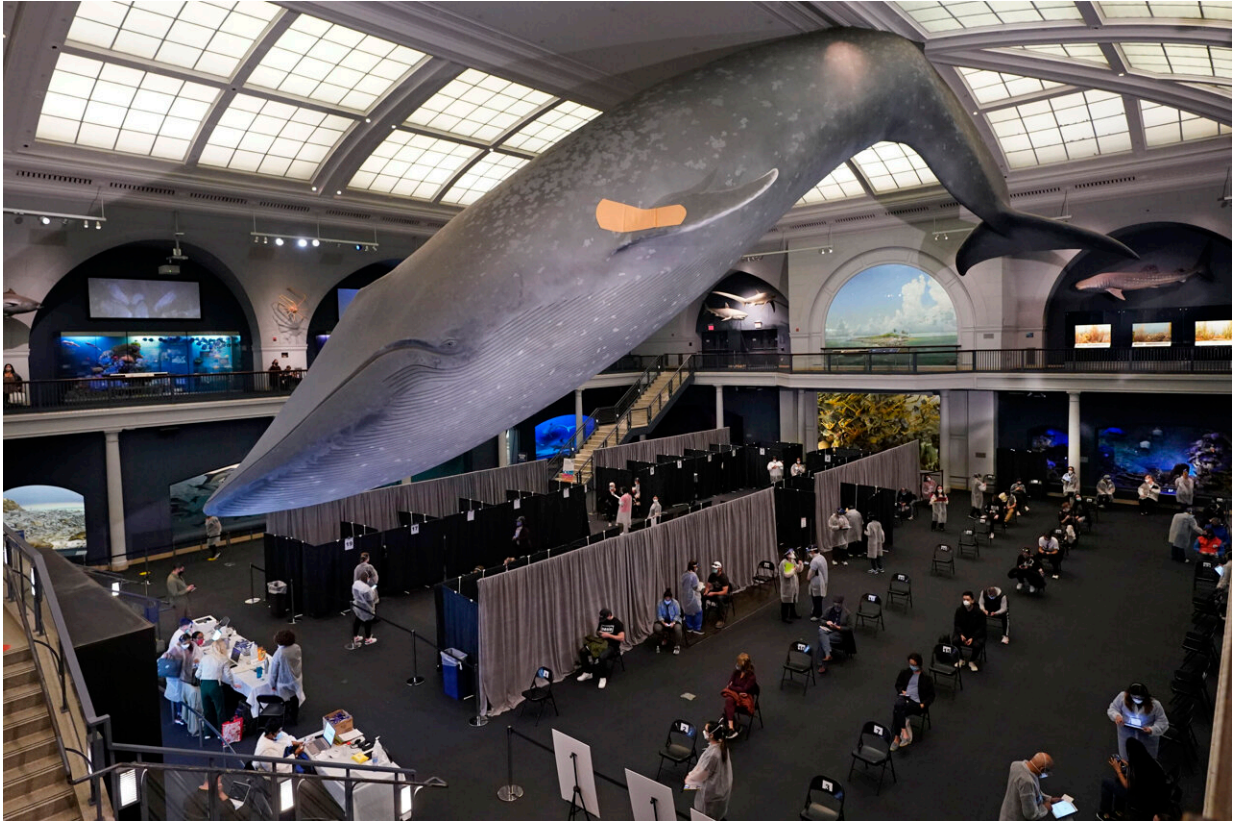
The Democrat said his administration still needed to speak with union officials about how to implement the policy. Some unions representing government workers in New York City have objected to the city's "get vaccinated or get tested" mandate set to take effect in mid-September.

CSEA President Mary Sullivan, whose union represents New York state and local government workers, said it supports Cuomo's vaccination policy: "(W)e cannot slide backwards now or we put our members, workers, our families, children and all of us at greater risk."

Meanwhile, New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association President Michael Powers said it's "disheartening" the state did not seek input from workers.

"Just a month ago, the state celebrated the lifting of restrictions with fireworks shows and now today's about-face," Powers said.

New York's court system said it plans to require unvaccinated judges and court employees to undergo regular testing, court officials said Wednesday.

People rest in the observation area, at right, after receiving COVID-19 vaccinations under the 94-foot-long, 21,000-pound model of a blue whale, in the Milstein Family Hall of Ocean Life, at the American Museum of Natural History, in New York, Friday, April 23, 2021. After months of coaxing people to get vaccinated against COVID-19 with incentives like museum tickets and transit passes, New York City is sweetening the pot by offering $100 to any city resident who gets a first dose of a coronavirus vaccine at a city-run site, Mayor Bill de Blasio said Wednesday, July 28, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Richard Drew, File

New York's state Legislature will require either vaccinations or regular testing, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said in statements issued Wednesday.

This summer, the state's public university system launched its own vaccinate-or-test policy for employees.

United University Professions president Fred Kowal said Cuomo's additional mandate for some state hospital workers would have to be negotiated, "which I am willing to negotiate."

Public Employees Federation Wayne Spence said unions will keep negotiating with the state, and said any required COVID-19 testing can't "put the health of our members at risk."

"PEF will continue to advocate for increased telecommuting where possible and strict COVID protocols in the workplace, including masks as required, proper air ventilation in all state offices, and social distancing as appropriate," Spence said.

Some Republicans blasted Cuomo's announcement: state Sen. George Borrello said state workers who fought COVID-19 on the frontlines "don't deserve to be bullied into being vaccinated."

Cuomo urged school districts to consider vaccination-or-testing policies if numbers keep increasing.

"A school can become a superspreader," he said. "We've seen that too many times in the past."

That's a shift from last fall, when Cuomo and other New York officials said the available data suggested schools weren't driving COVID-19 infection.

While overall rates of infection in New York remain much lower than they were over the winter, the voluntary vaccination campaign here has stalled, as it has in much of the U.S.

About 56.7% of 20 million residents are fully vaccinated.

Mayor Bill de Blasio announced Wednesday that New York City will sweeten the pot by offering $100 to any city resident who gets a first dose of a coronavirus vaccine at a city-run site.

New York City and the state have already offered vaccination incentives including lottery tickets, scholarships, free subway rides and complimentary tickets to museums, sports games and other attractions.

Other locales, including the state of New Mexico and the city of Gadsden, Alabama, also have offered $100 cash payments. Others have offered a more limited version—Ohio is offering $100 gift cards to Medicaid members who get inoculated, and West Virginia is providing $100 savings bonds to 16-to-35-year-olds who do so.

President Joe Biden is considering requiring federal employees to show proof of vaccination or submit to regular testing and wear a mask. A growing number of hospitals and nursing homes across the U.S. have been mandating vaccines for workers.