

New York Covid shot mandate boosts vaccination rates

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The results are in, and New York's pioneering gamble with mandating COVID-19 vaccines for health care workers has paid off: despite

holdouts, the hard-hit state and city has boosted inoculation rates.

New York was the first in the nation to order workers to get the shot or face their pay being suspended or even risk getting fired, a mandate that has been challenged several times in court—so far in vain.

As of September 27, all doctors, nurses and other staff at the state's hospitals both public and private—some 520,000 people—had to have been vaccinated in order to work.

Democratic Governor Kathy Hochul caused a sensation by pledging to call out the National Guard to replace unvaccinated [health care workers](#), raising fears of chaos in hospitals.

But officials stuck to their guns and in the end no [hospital](#) was closed down on Monday, the day the new vaccination policy went into effect in the state of 20 million people.

Hochul, who succeeded the disgraced Andrew Cuomo on August 25, also praised a rise in the proportion of hospital staff that are completely vaccinated—87 percent as of Wednesday.

And the percentage of nursing home staffers that have received at least one vaccine dose has gone up from 71 percent on August 24 to 92 percent as of Monday.

Hochul, who is undergoing one of her first political tests, said "this new information shows that holding firm on the vaccine mandate for health care workers is simply the right thing to do to protect our vulnerable family members and loved ones from COVID-19."

The coronavirus has killed more than 56,000 people in New York state—including 34,000 in the Big Apple—since March 2020.

Other states are expected to follow its lead, such as California starting Thursday—but in the nation's most populous state health care workers who refuse to get vaccinated can still work so long as they get tested every week.

- 'It's up to you' -

In New York City as of Wednesday there were a bit more than 3,000 health care workers unvaccinated out of a total of 43,000, compared to around 5,000 early in the week and some 8,000 last week, said Mitchell Katz, the CEO of government-run NYC Health + Hospitals.

"We do have temporary staffing of about 500 nurses who are filling in for those nurses who have not yet gotten vaccinated or have chosen for retirement. We haven't discharged anyone yet," he said.

Northwell Health, which runs 23 hospitals and more than 800 out-patient clinics in the state, said its workforce is now almost 100 percent vaccinated.

"Regretfully, we have had to exit a few hundred employees," it said, without specifying if they were fired.

But the situation varies from one hospital to the next in this state that stretches all the way up to the border with Canada.

At the Erie County Medical Center in the northern city of Buffalo, around five percent of the staff—167 of 3,303 workers—were suspended without pay, the hospital told AFP.

But that proportion reaches 20 percent in an affiliated long term care service, where roughly a hundred of 474 employees are not vaccinated.

So this hospital was forced to reschedule non-urgent surgery and change its operating hours.

The vaccination mandate for [health](#) care workers is a test case for New York ahead of mandatory shots for teachers. The start of the new policy for them has been delayed until Friday through a court order.

"Get your first dose by then or don't return to work on Monday. It's up to you," Mayor Bill de Blasio tweeted.

Most of the city's teachers are in fact vaccinated but teachers unions and some schools have said that an abrupt application of this new rule could disrupt schools.

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