

NYC mandates vaccinations for public school teachers, staff

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All New York City public school teachers and other staffers will have to get vaccinated against the coronavirus, officials said Monday, ramping up pandemic protections as the nation's largest school system prepares for classes to start next month.

The city [previously said teachers, like other city employees, would have to get the shots or get tested weekly](#) for the virus. The new policy marks the first no-option vaccination mandate for a broad group of city workers in the nation's most populous city, though Mayor Bill de Blasio announced Friday that coaches and students in football, basketball and other "high-risk" sports would have to get inoculated before play begins.

Unions bristled at the new requirement, saying the city needed to negotiate, not dictate. Two big city workers' groups were planning to file a labor complaint or take legal action.

About 148,000 school employees—and contractors who work in schools—will have to get at least a first dose by Sept. 27, according to an announcement from the Democratic mayor and the city health and education departments.

"We're going to do whatever it takes to make sure that everyone is safe," de Blasio said at a virtual news briefing. Schools Chancellor Meisha Ross Porter called the policy "another layer of protection for our kids," including her own 11th-grader.

The city hasn't immediately said whether there will be exemptions or what the penalty will be for refusing, though de Blasio told MSNBC later Monday that "there will clearly be consequences." The previous vaccinate-or-test requirement had provisions for unpaid suspensions for workers who didn't comply.

De Blasio said the city would start bargaining this week with school system unions over specifics, and officials hope for agreements. But the mayor said the city intends to implement the requirement Sept. 27, with or without a deal.

A union known as DC 37—which represents school aides, lunchroom workers and other staffers along with thousands of other city employees—said it would file an unfair labor practices complaint with the state Public Employment Relations Board. And the Municipal Labor Committee, an umbrella group of unions that together represent about 350,000 city workers, voted Monday to pursue legal action that could mean a lawsuit over the city's varying vaccination policies for city employees, chairperson Harry Nespoli said.

"All we want to do is sit down and try to negotiate the best policy that will protect the city and its workers," said Nespoli, who's vaccinated but worried about maintaining the option of undergoing testing instead of inoculation.

"We're concerned about the people in New York, too. We don't want to see people get sick," he said, but "there has to be an alternative if that person doesn't want to take that jab."

The city didn't immediately comment on the labor

groups' planned actions.

Other school unions also said they needed answers and input.

"I understand completely why you have the requirement: There's a pandemic. We just have to make sure that we negotiate accommodations if a doctor certifies that someone shouldn't get vaccinated, said Gregory Floyd, the president of Teamsters Local 237. It represents about 4,400 school safety agents.

The United Federation of Teachers raised the potential of arbitration "if necessary."

Custodians' union President Robert Troeller said he believed about 60% of the 850 members of Local 891 of the International Union of Operating Engineers had gotten at least a first shot, but some others "are dead-set against this."

At least 63% of all school employees already have been vaccinated, not including those who may have gotten their shots outside the city.

Citywide, over 70% of adults have gotten at least a first dose.

The new requirement came as [federal regulators gave full approval](#) to Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine, one of three vaccines available in the U.S. All already have authorization for emergency use, but officials hope the full approval will increase public confidence in the vaccines.

School starts Sept. 13 for the city's roughly 1 million public school students.

U.S. Education Secretary Miguel Cardona hailed the city's "leadership" on teacher vaccinations, tweeting that it's important to maximize the amount of inoculated people in schools.

New York, like some other cities and states, has been fighting the virus' highly contagious delta variant by ratcheting up pressure to get more people inoculated.

New York City last week [began requiring proof of](#)

[vaccination](#) to enter restaurant dining rooms, gyms and many other public places, a first-in-the-nation policy that a few other cities have copied. Meanwhile, New York state announced last week that hospital and nursing home workers would have to get inoculated.

Vaccine mandates for teachers are fairly rare so far in the U.S., though Washington state, for one, says teachers must be inoculated or face dismissal.

Vaccinate-or-test requirements for school employees are somewhat more common, existing in places including Los Angeles and Chicago, which are the two biggest U.S. school districts after New York. The state of New Jersey joined the list Monday with a new policy affecting teachers and state employees.

New York state's court system announced a vaccinate-or-test rule Monday for judges and staffers. Such policies already exist for [other state employees](#) and [transit system workers](#).

A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that about 6 in 10 Americans say students and teachers should have to wear face masks while in school, and that teachers and eligible students should also be required to get vaccinated. But Democrats and Republicans differ sharply on these issues, the poll found.

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