

AMA: Time to mandate COVID-19 vaccination is now

SEP 2, 2021

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What's the news: With the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine earning full approval from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the SARS-CoV-2 Delta variant wreaking havoc amid sluggish national rates of immunization, the AMA is strongly urging employers to require that their workers get vaccinated.

"Now is the time for the public and private sectors to come together, listen to the science, and mandate vaccination," said AMA President Gerald E. Harmon, MD.

"The FDA has approved the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine and the meticulously collected evidence from more than 100 million vaccinated Americans is clear: The vaccines we have to defeat COVID-19 are safe, effective, and the only way out of this pandemic," Dr. Harmon added, noting that "vaccine supply is ample, and for months, access has been easier."

Nearly all U.S. doctors—over 96%—are vaccinated against COVID-19, according to an AMA survey conducted in May.

Why it's important: Of Americans 12 or older who can get one of the three vaccines that have earned FDA approval or emergency use authorization, nearly 62% are fully vaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

A bare majority of all Americans have been fully vaccinated, despite the rapid spread of the highly contagious and dangerous Delta variant that is sending hospitalizations and deaths surging in what CDC Director Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH, has characterized as a "pandemic of the unvaccinated."

"For months, physicians have advocated for vaccination against COVID-19, urging our patients to take the step that will save their lives and protect those closest to them," said Dr. Harmon, a South Carolina family physician. "States have even offered numerous incentives—from lotteries with a chance to win a million dollars or scholarship money to cash prizes.

“But these incentives have not gotten us where we need to be,” he added. “The way to regain the upper hand in this fight is requiring vaccinations—specifically vaccine mandates.”

The sobering reality, Dr. Harmon said, is that “unless a significant percentage of our population is vaccinated against COVID-19, we could be stuck fighting this virus for many more months or even years to come.”

Doctors and other health professionals on the front lines “have taken tremendous risks during this pandemic, and we continue today risking our own safety and well-being—putting our families at risk—to treat mostly unvaccinated people afflicted with COVID-19,” Dr. Harmon said. “Help us win this fight, follow science, and end this pandemic by requiring vaccination.”

According to a report from NBC News, employers as varied as Amtrak, Cisco, Goldman Sachs, Microsoft, Tyson Foods and United Airlines are among those instituting some form of COVID-19 vaccine requirement for employees.

Learn more: Vaccine mandates are not new. Such requirements have “been used across the U.S. and around the world for generations to defeat polio, measles and other vaccine-preventable disease,” Dr. Harmon noted.

In July, the AMA and nearly 60 other organizations representing physicians, nurses, pharmacists and other health professionals signed a joint letter calling for all health care and long-term care employers to require their employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

Read about the AMA’s robust policy on COVID-19 vaccine mandates, adopted at the June 2021 AMA Special Meeting.

The AMA has developed frequently-asked-questions documents on COVID-19 vaccination covering safety, allocation and distribution, administration and more. There are two FAQs, one designed to answer patients’ questions (PDF), and another to address physicians’ COVID-19 vaccine questions (PDF).

For more information on COVID-19 vaccine developments, visit the AMA vaccine resource guide.