Why doctors back state COVID-19 vaccine mandates for health care

OCT 5, 2021

Kevin B. O'Reilly
News Editor

What's the news: Physicians are voicing their support for state efforts to require that doctors and other health professionals get vaccinated to protect themselves, their loved ones and their patients from the worst outcomes of COVID-19.

In particular, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul recently implemented such a COVID-19 vaccine mandate for the health care industry in the Empire State. The AMA joined with the Medical Society of the State of New York (MSSNY) to strongly support the governor's efforts.

“The path to ending the pandemic must be based on science, and vaccination is an indispensable part of the solution,” says a joint statement from AMA President Gerald E. Harmon, MD, and MSSNY President Joseph R. Sellers, MD.

“AMA, MSSNY and the physicians we represent understand that there are many who are confused and uncertain,” says the statement. “We remind everyone with questions or concerns about the COVID-19 vaccine to turn to their trusted physicians to guide them. We will continue to work with Gov. Hochul and her administration to help promote vaccination for all as a key to ending this pandemic.”

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

Why it’s important: According to the AMA Code of Medical Ethics, when there’s a safe, effective vaccine to help prevent spread of a pandemic disease, physicians have an ethical duty to become immunized.

“In the context of a highly transmissible disease that poses significant medical risk for vulnerable patients or colleagues, or threatens the availability of the health care workforce, particularly a disease that has potential to become epidemic or pandemic, and for which there is an available, safe and effective vaccine, physicians have a responsibility to accept immunization absent a recognized
medical contraindication or when a specific vaccine would pose a significant risk to the physician’s patients,” says the AMA’s ethical advice.

Many health care organizations around the country already have implemented COVID-19 vaccine requirements for their employees. Among them is Kaiser Permanente. Find out how Permanente doctors are pushing ahead with a vaccine mandate.

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 earlier this year.

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.