

Mills Administration Requires Health Care Workers To Be Fully Vaccinated Against COVID-19 By October 1

August 12, 2021

Governor Mills' decision garners support from a broad coalition of health care providers across Maine

Augusta, MAINE – The Mills Administration announced today that it will require health care workers in Maine to be vaccinated against COVID-19 to protect the health and lives of Maine people, safeguard Maine's health care capacity, and limit the spread of the virus.

The Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC), utilizing their authority under existing law to require certain vaccinations of people who work in health care settings, issued an emergency rule that will require health care workers to be fully vaccinated by October 1, 2021. This timeframe provides health care workers the next five weeks to receive their needed shots.

Health care workers are defined as including any individual employed by a hospital, multi-level health care facility, home health agency, nursing facility, residential care facility, and intermediate care facility for individuals with intellectual disabilities that is licensed by the State of Maine. The emergency rule also requires those employed by emergency medical service organizations or dental practices to be vaccinated for COVID-19.

With this move, Maine becomes one of the most aggressive states in the nation in requiring vaccination of health care workers, both in terms of the scope of health care workers and timeframe for vaccination.

"Vaccinations are the best tool we have to protect the lives and livelihoods of Maine people and to curb this pandemic," said Governor Mills. "Health care workers perform a critical role in protecting the health of Maine people, and it is imperative that they take every precaution against this dangerous virus, especially given the threat of the highly transmissible Delta variant. With this requirement, we are protecting health care workers, their patients, including our most vulnerable, and our health care capacity. I continue to strongly urge all Maine people to get vaccinated because doing so may save your life, the life of a family member or friend, or the life of a child not yet eligible for a vaccine."

"Maine's hospitals, clinics, nursing facilities and other health providers are on the front lines of the fight against COVID-19," said Jeanne Lambrew, Commissioner of the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. "We thank those who have already taken this critical step for themselves, their patients and their communities, but with the arrival of the Delta variant in Maine, it is more important than ever to protect these workers through vaccination."

"Scientific data show that vaccination is our best protection against all strains of the virus that causes COVID-19," said Nirav D. Shah, Director of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention. "Given the elevated risk posed by the Delta variant, this is a prudent step in preventing COVID-19 from putting more Maine people at risk, especially those who care for others."

The State of Maine has long required the immunization of employees of designated health care facilities to reduce the risk of exposure to, and possible transmission of, vaccine-preventable diseases. These immunizations include measles, mumps, rubella, chickenpox, hepatitis B, and influenza. This existing rule has been amended to include the COVID-19 vaccine. The organizations to which this requirement applies must ensure that each employee is vaccinated, with this requirement being enforced as a condition of the facilities' licensure.

According to a [mandated survey](#) of health care settings by the Department of Health and Human Services, 80.3 percent of staff at hospitals, 73 percent of staff at nursing facilities, and 68.2 percent of staff at intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

The move was welcomed by a broad coalition of health care providers across Maine, including Maine Hospital Association, Maine Medical Association, Maine Primary Care Association, and Maine Health Care Association, along with the state's two largest health systems, MaineHealth and Northern Light Health.

*"Maine's hospitals and health systems are beyond thankful for the Governor's leadership on this issue," said **Steven Michaud, President of the Maine Hospital Association.** "A statewide health care worker vaccine mandate protects our patients and workforce and is critically needed as we continue our battle with this pandemic. Patient safety is our number one priority and this initiative is the very best way to provide that protection. This will save lives, keep caregivers healthy, and keep our hospitals safe as we care for all of our patients, those with COVID-19 and those without."*

*"Over 95 percent of physicians and nearly 200 million Americans have received a vaccine. It's clear they are safe and highly effective," said **Karen Saylor, MD, President of the Maine Medical Association.** "The Delta variant is much more aggressive and currently overwhelming hospitals across the country. Unvaccinated health care workers put sick patients and facility residents at risk. This is the next step in our state's responsible path of keeping us ready with the staff and space needed to care for all Mainers at risk of severe illness or death."*

*"Maine's long term care providers continue to provide high quality care to residents," said **Angela Westhoff, president and CEO of the Maine Health Care Association.** "Our residents are among the most vulnerable when it comes to this virus. While we have made significant progress in increasing staff vaccination rates through education campaigns, there is more work to be done to combat the highly contagious Delta variant. MHCA supports this move to protect the health and wellbeing of our residents. COVID-19 vaccines have dramatically reduced COVID-19 cases and the severity of illness in long term care settings, and this is the best tool we have to fight the pandemic."*

*"We know that every health care organization is undergoing careful consideration to ensure the health and safety of patients and staff," said **Tim Dentry, President and CEO of Northern Light Health.** "At Northern Light Health we feel strongly that vaccinations are our best path forward and away from the dangers of the COVID-19 virus. Governor Mills' decision to require vaccination of health care workers is another example of close alignment between the government and the health care community. There is a reason why Maine is among the best states for COVID care and vaccination. With the new Delta variant, we cannot stray from our course."*

*"MaineHealth applauds Gov. Mills' decision to make COVID-19 vaccination a requirement for the state's health care workforce for the same reasons our organization chose to require vaccination for all of its care team members," said **Dr. Andrew Mueller, MD, CEO of MaineHealth.** "The vaccines are proven safe and effective, and vaccination remains the best way for us to protect our patients and communities from this terrible pandemic."*

*"The Maine Primary Care Association supports the state's decision to mandate the COVID-19 vaccine for all health care employees," said **Darcy Shargo, CEO of the Maine Primary Care Association.** "We believe that everyone who is able to get the vaccine should, including the community health centers' workforce, which has been so vital to our state's pandemic response. This step is so important to getting us to the next level of response as a state, and it has the potential to get us closer to the lives we led before COVID."*

*"EMS clinicians across the state are an integral component of the health care system and continue to be critical to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic," said **Sam Hurley, Maine State EMS Director.** "As*

health care professionals, it makes sense that we should do everything in our power to protect the health and safety of ourselves, our families, our colleagues, and our patients, including receiving the COVID-19 vaccine.”

“The Maine Dental Association and its members have been proactive about COVID-19 vaccinations and keeping their practices as safe as possible for patients,” **said Dr. Heather Keeling, President of the Maine Dental Association’s Board of Directors.** “That will continue with the Governor’s new requirement, which we fully support. Recent data from the American Dental Association has shown dental offices are one of the safest health care facilities during this pandemic. Just like our fellow front line health care professionals, we are ready to continue to do our part to prevent infection.”

Maine continues to make nation-leading progress with its vaccination effort. On Monday, Governor Mills announced that 80 percent of adults in Maine have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, achieving another milestone for the state as it continues to confront an increase in cases associated with the Delta variant. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (U.S. CDC), 80.5 percent of adults (18+) in Maine have received a COVID-19 vaccination, one of eight states in the nation to reach the milestone.

Maine is the third best state in the nation in the percentage of residents who are fully vaccinated, with more than 64 percent of all residents – including children under 12 who are not yet eligible for a vaccine – fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Maine also continues to make progress in vaccinating younger people, with more than 50 percent of youth ages 12 to 19 being fully vaccinated.

COVID-19 vaccines are available at no charge at sites across the state. For information on getting a vaccine, please visit [Maine.gov/covid19/vaccines](https://maine.gov/covid19/vaccines) or call the Community Vaccination Line at 1-888-445-4111.

Despite having the oldest median age population in the country, Maine, adjusted for population, ranks fourth lowest in the nation in hospitalizations over the last two weeks, third lowest in total number of cases, and fourth lowest in number of deaths from COVID-19, according to the Maine Department of Health and Human Services.

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