

## OHA POLICY STATEMENT REGARDING COVID-19 VACCINATION

AUGUST 2, 2021

As health care leaders and the core of the COVID-19 response in communities across Ohio, hospital personnel have been heroic over the past eighteen months in caring for their patients. Providing a safe place for patients to receive care is of paramount importance to hospitals, and patients expect to receive care in a setting that minimizes their risk of acquiring or transmitting COVID-19. Furthermore, we owe it to our brave hospital employees and staff to provide them the safest environment in which to do their jobs.

This commitment to the safety of patients and hospital staff is why hospitals across the country have historically required vaccination against seasonal flu and other contagious diseases, and why some hospitals have recently announced COVID-19 vaccine requirements. Accordingly, **OHA recommends hospitals independently adopt policies requiring COVID-19 vaccination for employees and staff, with local factors determining whether, how and when such policies are implemented.**

Hospital employee and staff vaccination against COVID-19 will maintain the long-term ability of our health care system to respond to the pandemic, to safely care for patients by protecting them from infection, and to mitigate the spread of the virus within health care facilities and among patients, hospital personnel and their families and friends.

### UNIQUE CIRCUMSTANCES OF EACH HOSPITAL AND COMMUNITY IN OHIO

OHA recognizes the unique circumstances of each hospital and community in Ohio and understands that vaccine requirements are embraced by some people and rejected by others. Accordingly, OHA respects each hospital's ability to engage in this discussion within their facility and community at a time that is appropriate for them and to implement their desired policy in a way that works for them.

The development of COVID-19 vaccines at such a rapid pace is a remarkable feat of science and public-private collaboration. The vaccines that have been approved by the FDA under emergency use authorization have been rigorously tested. Today, 164.9 million Americans and 5.39 million Ohioans are fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines are extraordinary. The extensive data gathered from around the world prove that the vaccines work -- they save lives and significantly reduce serious illness and hospitalization.

Unfortunately, large segments of the population remain unvaccinated and continue to be at high risk of acquiring and transmitting COVID-19. In fact, as of July 26, The CDC reports that more than 99.9% of COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths nationally are of people who are unvaccinated. At the same time, the emergence of COVID-19 variants, including the Delta variant that has become the dominant strain in many parts of the world, continue to fuel a resurgence of the virus because of high rates of unvaccinated people.

The low vaccination rate across Ohio and the country endangers not only the unvaccinated, which includes children under 12 years old and individuals who are immunocompromised, but invites continued mutations of even more dangerous strains of the virus to develop, putting the health of our communities at serious risk. It is important for hospitals and health systems to lead in the critical mission to increase vaccination rates.

**The Ohio Hospital Association strongly encourages all Ohioans, especially health care personnel, to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.**

### **GUIDANCE FOR HOSPITALS THAT REQUIRE VACCINATION**

OHA encourages hospitals that require vaccinations to:

- Develop a process for determining appropriate medical and religious exemptions, consistent with applicable laws;
- Continue to educate reluctant staff and others in your community about the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines;
- Follow relevant CDC and other federal and state guidance regarding infection control practices for unvaccinated staff; and
- Announce such a requirement in advance and offer scheduling flexibility to ensure personnel have paid time to obtain the vaccine and recover from potential side effects.

Hospitals that require vaccination of their employees and staff should determine for themselves what the consequences of noncompliance will be. Legally permissible consequences for noncompliance may include:

- Requiring unvaccinated staff to wear masks
- Requiring unvaccinated staff to socially distance;
- Reassigning unvaccinated staff to other roles;
- Periodic testing of unvaccinated staff;
- Discipline/unpaid leave/termination.

\*\* Hospitals should work through their human resources and legal departments when determining and implementing any consequences of noncompliance with the hospital's vaccine policy.

### **QUESTIONS?**

Please contact:

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