



# Vaccine mandate update

**DATE:** November 5, 2021  
**TO:** All Employees  
**FROM:** Jeff Paterson, Chief Executive Officer  
**RE:** Update on federal vaccine mandate

Yesterday, the federal government released details on the vaccine mandate for employers. All agencies like Empower will be covered by the mandate. Here is what we know so far.

## **Intermediate Care Facilities (Niagara ICF, 17th Street ICF, Lockport ICF, Ward Road ICF)**

ICFs are considered healthcare facilities. They are covered by the vaccine mandate issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. All employees with regular duties in ICFs, as well as contracted therapists, must receive their **first vaccine dose by December 5, 2021**; if receiving the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, employees must receive their **second vaccine dose by January 4, 2022**. This mandate applies to all healthcare facilities in the United States.

## **All Other Agency Sites**

All other Empower employees are covered by the vaccine mandate issued by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which **takes effect January 4, 2022**. At that time, all employees must provide proof of full vaccination or undergo weekly COVID-19 testing. This mandate applies to all employers in the United States with more than 100 employees, including all of the other agencies like Empower; there are now very few places where you can work without being subject to a vaccine mandate.

## **Religious and Medical Exemptions**

The federal vaccine mandates do allow for exemptions based on medical status or religious beliefs. Empower is responsible for providing a form and process for employees to request these exemptions. We will provide this information to you as soon as possible. We will give serious consideration to all such requests. Medical exemption requests will need to be signed by a qualified healthcare professional.

### **Testing Option**

ICF employees do not have the option of weekly testing as an alternative to vaccination. All other employees will have a test-out option when the mandate takes effect in January. Employers are **not** obligated to pay for or provide testing, or to provide paid time for employees to be tested. We will provide more information on testing options as soon as possible.

### **Face Coverings**

Even if fully vaccinated, employees may still be required to wear face coverings in particular sites and programs as directed by regulatory agencies. At this time, face coverings are required in all sites regardless of vaccination status.

### **Cash Incentive for Vaccination**

I remind you that Empower is offering a cash incentive for employees to be vaccinated. Please refer to the memo you received on October 15, 2021, or request a new copy from your supervisor or from the Human Resources Office. This cash incentive is still in place, and will remain available until further notice.

### **Unemployment Insurance**

Employees who end up unemployed by not complying with the vaccine mandate will not be eligible for unemployment benefits.

### **Benefits of Vaccination**

Nearly 4 billion people have been vaccinated worldwide. The COVID-19 vaccines have proven to be extraordinarily safe and effective. While a vaccinated person may be infected with COVID-19, studies show that fully vaccinated people are 5 times less likely to contract COVID and 10 times less likely to be hospitalized with COVID than those who are unvaccinated. Unvaccinated people are 11 times more likely than unvaccinated people to die from COVID-19. If you have concerns or questions about vaccination, please speak to your healthcare provider.

### **How to Be Vaccinated**

Vaccination is free. Most pharmacies offer walk-in vaccine access, or you can visit [www.niagaracounty.com/health](http://www.niagaracounty.com/health) to register for local clinics held by the Niagara County Health Department.

Please stay tuned. We will continue to provide up-to-date information as we have it. Thank you.