Vaccine Mandate at Cambridge Health Alliance
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

These Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are designed to provide answers to common questions about the COVID-19 vaccination mandate at Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA) locations that will begin on September 13, 2021, with a deadline of getting all doses of the COVID-19 vaccine by October 18, 2021.

Important Notice: These FAQs have been drafted to align with current guidance and law as of the date above and are subject **to change quickly**. Infectious disease guidance is constantly changing as they review data and research as well as any guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We must be adaptable and will update these FAQs to align with best practices.

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1. **Why did CHA make this decision?**

The health of our patients, employees and community is our priority. This is not a decision that we take lightly. CHA Division of Infectious Diseases, Emergency Management, Occupational Health, and Senior Leadership have been closely monitoring the data to ensure that vaccine mandation is the safest approach. Throughout the pandemic, we have taken every possible step to ensure the wellbeing of our patients and employees, and a vaccine mandate will help to provide the safest environment for our staff and the individuals and communities we serve. The current variants appear to be causing an increased spread of COVID-19 among unvaccinated individuals across the country. To continue to protect our community, COVID-19 vaccination will become mandatory for all CHA employees, barring an approved religious or medical exemption.

2. **Which staff at CHA must get the COVID-19 vaccination?**

All regular, part-time, per diem, locum, travelers, contractors, and interim staff must receive the COVID-19 vaccination (or a medical or religious exemption) regardless of role or level of patient interaction.

3. **Will newly hired employees have to also be vaccinated?**

CHA will not hire anyone who is not vaccinated or in receipt of an approved medical or religious exemption starting September 13, 2021.

4. **When do I have to be vaccinated?**

The deadline for receiving both doses of the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine or 1 dose of the J&J Vaccine is **October 18, 2021**. If you are not vaccinated or have not received an approved religious or medical exemption by October 18, 2021 you will be placed on unpaid administrative leave.

5. **How can I get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Beginning Wednesday, August 18th, the vaccine is available to you at our hospital campuses, Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA) Somerville Vaccine Center and our pharmacy locations listed below:

- **Cambridge Hospital Campus** (Healy Ambulatory Building 3rd Floor)
    - Tuesdays: 7:30 am - 3:30 pm
    - Thursdays:7:30 am - 3:30 pm
- **Everett Hospital campus** (East Lobby entrance)
    - Mondays: 7:30 am - 3:30 pm
    - Fridays:7:30 am - 3:30 pm
- **Somerville campus** (Cafeteria Conference Room)

    - Wednesdays: 7:30 am - 3:30 pm

- **CHA Somerville Vaccine Center:** *Pfizer vaccine for people 12 and older by walk in or appointment.*
  176 Somerville Ave, Somerville, MA 02143
  - ***Hours:***
    - Mon, Tues: 11:00 am - 6:30 pm
    - Wed, Thu, Fri: 8:30 am - 4:00 pm

- **CHA Pharmacy Locations:** Currently *Moderna and J&J vaccine are available for people 18 and older during the below times:*
  - CHA Cambridge Hospital - 2nd floor main building
    (M-F from 8:30am-8pm and Sat-Sun from 9am-3pm)

    1493 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA 02139
  - CHA East Cambridge Care Center *(M-F from 8:30am-5pm)*
    163 Gore Street Cambridge, MA 02141
  - CHA Malden Care Center - 1st floor *(M-Th 8:30am-8pm, F 10am-5pm, Sat 10am-1pm)*
    195 Canal Street Malden, MA 02148

- **On Site Vaccine Clinics**
  Will be scheduled in the upcoming weeks

- **You can find a Massachusetts vaccination center through https://vaxfinder.mass.gov/. In other states you can find a site through https://www.vaccines.gov/**

6. **Do I have to get the vaccine through CHA?**

No, employees do not have to get vaccinated through CHA. You may get vaccinated at another eligible health care organization or any other authorized vaccination site, as long as you receive either 2 doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine, 2 doses of the Moderna Vaccine, or 1 dose of the Johnson & Johnson's Janssen COVID-19 Vaccine (J&J Vaccine). If you have been vaccinated and CHA does not have proof of your vaccination status, then it is critical that you contact CHA's Occupational Health Department to verify whether the vaccine you received meets CHA's requirements. You can contact Occupational Health at occhealth@challiance.org

7. **What if I have already been fully vaccinated through CHA?**

If you have already been fully vaccinated through CHA by receiving 2 doses of the Moderna or Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine or 1 dose of the J&J Vaccine, then there is nothing more

to do at this time. You may have to get another vaccine in the future if recommended by public health guidance but this is not yet a requirement.

8. **What if I have only received one dose of the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine?**

If you have only received one dose of the Moderna or Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine, then you must receive your second dose by the due date of October 18, 2021. If you need additional time to receive the second dose, then you may request additional time through Occupational Health.

9. **What if I have already been fully vaccinated outside of CHA?**

If you have been vaccinated through another health organization or authorized vaccination center, then you must provide proof of vaccination to our Occupational Health department that will confirm it is an acceptable vaccine. If it is not approved, then CHA will provide you with time to get the correct vaccine. You can search "COVID documentation form" on Staffnet to access the form or if onsite link here to the form.

10. **What if I have been vaccinated outside of the United States?**

There are multiple vaccines available outside of the United States but only the Pfizer, Moderna, and the J&J vaccines are sufficient for CHA's mandate. If you have been vaccinated outside of the United States and would like to use that proof to address this mandate, then you must provide proof of vaccination to our Occupational Health department that will confirm it is an acceptable vaccine. If it is not approved, you will need to get the correct vaccine. You can search "COVID documentation form" on Staffnet to access the form or if onsite link here to the form.

11. **What will happen if I do not get the vaccine?**

Employees not fully vaccinated by October 18, 2021, will be placed on unpaid leave. Those on unpaid leave will be given until November 5, 2021 to receive their final dose of the vaccine or their employment with CHA will be terminated, unless they have an approved medical or religious exemption.

12. **How will CHA confirm who has received the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Managers will receive lists of those who are not on file as having received both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. Staff will be notified if they are on the list. If they have not been vaccinated, then they must get vaccinated by October 18, 2021. If they have been vaccinated at another location, then they must provide proof of vaccination by October 18, 2021.

13. **How long does the COVID-19 Vaccine last?**

At this time, it is unclear how long the COVID-19 vaccine will last but there is evidence that it may protect you from COVID-19 for several months or even years. There will be continuous research to determine when and how booster shots may be needed. For now, continue to read the guidance and CHA Communications for additional information.

14. Who do I talk to if I feel unsure about getting vaccinated?

Outreach, support and education is available through CHA to employees who remain hesitant to receive the vaccine. Occupational Health is available to have these discussions. Alternatively, you may access support through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) at https://kgreer.com or 1-800-648-9557. You can also talk to your manager.

15. Are other healthcare organizations mandating the vaccine?

Numerous hospitals and health care organizations throughout the country (including many organizations within Massachusetts) are mandating the COVID-19 vaccine for purposes of protecting the safety of patients and staff. CHA and many other hospitals in Massachusetts already require vaccinations for other highly communicable illnesses, such as influenza, as a requirement of employment. This important measure is one of multiple infection controls hospitals use to prevent outbreaks.

16. May I get an exemption from the vaccine requirement for medical reasons?

By law, some individuals may be eligible for a reasonable accommodation from the vaccine requirement based on federal law if they demonstrate that they have a disability covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you believe that you have a medical reason why you cannot get the vaccine, you must fill out the COVID documentation form on Staffnet to begin the process of applying. You can search "COVID documentation form" on Staffnet to access the form or if onsite link here to the form.

17. Can I get a medical exemption if I am pregnant?

On August 11, 2021, the CDC provided guidance that the COVID-19 vaccination is recommended for those who are pregnant, breastfeeding, and would like to get pregnant in the future. CDC Guidance: Covid-19 Vaccines while Pregnant or Breastfeeding. It noted that there is evidence that the research and data on the effectiveness and safety of the COVID-19 vaccine has been growing and demonstrates that the vaccine is safe for individuals in these categories. *See id.* There is no evidence of fertility problems in those who receive the vaccine. *See id*. Further, there have been cases of increased risk for severe illness among those who are diagnosed with COVID-19 while pregnant. *See id.* Additional details on the safety and recommendations are available at: CDC Guidance: Covid-19 Vaccines while Pregnant or Breastfeeding.

Although the vaccine has been found to be safe during pregnancy, you can apply for a temporary medical exemption.

18. How do I apply for a medical exemption?

If you believe that you have a medical reason why you cannot get the vaccine, you must fill out the COVID documentation form on Staffnet to begin the process of applying for an exemption. You can search "COVID documentation form" on Staffnet to access the form or if onsite link here to the form. You must apply for a medical exemption, including providing all required documentation by October 1, 2021.

19. **What is a religious exemption?**

A religious exemption may be available if an employee can demonstrate a sincerely held religious belief, practice, or observance. The criteria will be discussed and evaluated by an interdisciplinary panel who will evaluate whether the religious belief, practice, or observance meets federal standards.

20. **How do I apply for a religious exemption?**

If you believe that you have a religious reason why you cannot get the vaccine, you must fill out the COVID documentation form on Staffnet to begin the process of applying for an exemption. You can search "COVID documentation form" on Staffnet to access the form or if onsite link here to the form. You must apply for a religious exemption, including providing all required documentation by October 1, 2021. The interdisciplinary panel will also meet with the individual requesting the exemption and will decide whether to approve or deny the exemption request.

21. **If my exemption is accepted will I have to take other precautions?**

An unvaccinated CHA staff member with an exemption will have to follow all current safety protocols including wearing a face mask and practicing social distancing. You may be required to get periodic tests for COVID-19 in the future.

22. **Is there any other way to be exempted from the vaccine mandate?**

The only exemptions being provided at this time are for medical or religious reasons.

23. **I work completely remotely. Do I still have to get the vaccine?**

Yes, all staff who are remote must get vaccinated. As noted above, **all** regular, part-time, per diem, locum, travelers, contractors, and interim staff must receive the COVID-19 vaccination regardless of role or patient interaction. It is the responsibility of every CHA employee to maintain a safe environment by lessening the risk of COVID-19 transmission in our facilities and our communities.