



Baker Expanding Vaccine Requirement For Caregivers

More Staff Face Oct. 31 Deadline to Get Vaccinated

Chris Lisinski 9/1/21 2:49 PM

SEPT. 1, 2021.....All staff in Massachusetts rest homes, assisted living residences and hospice programs and home care workers who provide in-home direct care would need to get vaccinated against COVID-19 in the next two months under an expanded mandate introduced Wednesday by Gov. Charlie Baker's administration.

The administration announced it would seek to broaden an existing vaccination requirement on certain long-term care staff to include many more caregivers across hundreds of facilities in an effort to "protect older adults against COVID-19," which continues to spread even as more and more people obtain vaccinations.

Officials said the proposed mandate, which drew praise from affected industry leaders, would apply to workers directly employed by facilities and to contractors who regularly enter facilities. Sixty-two freestanding rest homes, 85 hospice programs and 268 assisted living residences would fall under the new mandate.

The policy is subject to approval from the Public Health Council, which has a meeting scheduled for Sept. 8. The council has consented to numerous pandemic-related proposals introduced by the governor.

Up to 100,000 home care workers will also need to comply with the expanded requirement, according to the Baker administration. That includes individuals providing in-home, direct care employed by a state-contracted or state-subcontracted agency, and it also applies to independent, non-agency home care workers contracted with the state such as personal care attendants in the MassHealth program.

Affected caregivers must get vaccinated by Oct. 31 unless they qualify for a medical or religious exemption, under the proposal.

Tara Gregorio, president of the Massachusetts Senior Care Association that represents long-term care facilities covered by the original mandate and assisted living facilities added under the expanded version, applauded Gov. Baker and his administration for the updated policy.

"The Governor's action today, further expanding the Covid-19 vaccination mandate to include all eldercare workers, is critically important to ensure the safety and well-being of citizens across the Commonwealth, including our vulnerable skilled nursing facility residents and dedicated staff," Gregorio said in a statement. "The Governor's announcement will create parity, transparency, and accountability within the entire health care system, which is ultimately to the benefit of consumers and their caregivers."

Gregorio added that more than a dozen other states have adopted similar mandates. She also said that a poll of 1,000 registered voters that GS Strategies conducted in May for MSCA found 72 percent of voters "overwhelmingly supported a statewide mandate for all healthcare employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19."

The new mandate builds on a public health order Department of Public Health Acting Commissioner Margret Cooke [issued last month](#) requiring long-term care workers in skilled nursing facilities and soldiers' homes -- which care for older adults who face greater risks of serious illness and death from COVID-19 -- to get fully vaccinated by Oct. 10.

Many hospitals are also requiring their workforces to get immunized against COVID-19. Some parts of the health care sector, such as rehabilitation centers, do not fall under either the Baker administration's original long-term care vaccine mandate or its expanded caretaker mandate.

Massachusetts Health and Hospital Association President and CEO Steve Walsh praised the expanded mandate on Wednesday, referencing the recent increase in COVID-19 case counts and hospitalizations driven by the more infectious Delta variant.

"The threat of COVID-19 has only increased in the past several weeks, and it has never been more important for those treating patients to be protected," Walsh said in a statement.

"Thanks to the policies put in place by the state and our providers, community members can take comfort in knowing that they are receiving the safest care possible -- whether they (are) at their local hospital or in other care settings that they rely on for their health and wellbeing."

Baker last month [also issued](#) a vaccine mandate for about 42,000 executive branch workers. Those who do not get vaccinated or secure a medical or religious exemption by Oct. 17 could face consequences including termination.

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