

New York City Issues Covid-19 Vaccine Mandate for All Public Employees; Several unions say they expect many employees to leave their jobs rather than get vaccinated

Vielkind, Jimmy; Mai-Duc, Christine; Kamp, Jon . Wall Street Journal (Online) ; New York, N.Y. [New York, N.Y.]. 20 Oct 2021.

[ProQuest document link](#)

FULL TEXT

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced an order mandating that all municipal workers must get vaccinated against Covid-19, setting up a conflict with unions that said they opposed the new rule.

Mr. de Blasio's move on Wednesday ended an existing option of weekly testing and means some 46,000 city workers need to get their first shot by Oct. 29 or potentially lose their jobs, a spokeswoman for the Democrat said. The order covers 160,500 workers, of whom about 71% are partially or fully vaccinated, according to official estimates. The city said 70% of police and 60% of fire department personnel have received at least one shot. Leaders of several unions representing affected New York City workers said they expected hundreds or thousands of employees would leave their jobs rather than get vaccinated.

"You'll have police officers walking off—firefighters, EMTs and paramedics walking off. Who's going to respond to these calls?" said Oren Barzilay, head of a union that represents paramedics and emergency medical technicians employed by the fire department. "We are in for dark days in our city, and it's crazy."

Mr. Barzilay said about half of his union's 4,100 members are unvaccinated.

Noncompliant employees will be placed on unpaid leave and City Hall officials plan to negotiate in the coming days with labor unions about procedures that would follow. The city already requires vaccines for educational and public healthcare workers. Among the 167,000 employees of the city's school system, 96% have complied.

A spokesman for the Police Benevolent Association of the City of New York said it would "proceed with legal action to protect our members' rights." During a press conference, Mr. de Blasio said he was confident the city's mandate would withstand any legal challenge, and that officials would use overtime and redeploy workers to continue services.

New York City's roughly 8,000 correction officers will face a later deadline of Dec. 1. The city has been struggling to maintain staffing levels at its Rikers Island jail complex.

The deadlines in some other states and cities that require their employees to get vaccinated, without a testing option, have arrived in recent days. Governments in those places are now taking steps to deal with thousands of employees who haven't complied. Some have quit or been dismissed, some have been placed on leave, and some have been given monthslong extensions to get their shots.

Many of the unvaccinated work in law enforcement, firefighting and correctional institutions.

The question of whether to fire such employees is particularly challenging as many governments, like private businesses, are already struggling to recruit and retain workers.

Exemptions to the mandates are typically allowed for medical or religious reasons.

In Chicago, Superintendent of Police David Brown said at a press conference Tuesday that 67% of the department's employees had reported whether or not they were vaccinated by the city's Oct. 15 deadline,

compared with 79% of workers citywide. The deadline for Chicago employees to get vaccinated is late December. City administrators were holding one-on-one meetings with workers who hadn't complied, Mr. Brown said. So far, they have met with hundreds of officers and civilian employees, and 21 have been placed on unpaid leave. "We're sworn to protect these people in the community. It would go against our oath to take this virus into their homes," Mr. Brown said.

In San Francisco, Mayor London Breed, a Democrat, said Tuesday that 96% of 35,000 municipal workers are vaccinated and the city is conducting hearings in the cases of 396 who haven't complied with the city's mandate. Los Angeles had required that its 53,168 municipal employees be vaccinated by Wednesday or seek an exemption. According to a proposal released Tuesday, city officials are considering extending the deadline to Dec. 18. Data released by the mayor's office show 70% of city employees have reported being fully vaccinated.

About 58% of L.A. fire department employees were fully vaccinated as of Tuesday, city data showed. More than 800 firefighters have filed papers saying they intend to sue the city to overturn the mandate.

Unions representing some state and local government workers have argued that vaccine requirements violate collective bargaining agreements or individual rights to choose whether and when to get the protective shots.

In Massachusetts, unions for prison workers and state police troopers sued in September, seeking to delay the state's vaccine mandate. Judges in both cases denied the requests.

"For various reasons, the individual Plaintiffs wish to exercise their constitutional right to decline this medical treatment, but they also wish to keep their employment and continue their careers," the corrections officers union wrote in its federal court complaint.

The deadline for Massachusetts state workers to get vaccinated was Sunday. The next day, Gov. Charlie Baker's office said about 95% of the workforce submitted a required vaccine attestation form or applied for a religious or medical exemption. But 1,571 state employees had not met these requirements, the governor's office said.

The state plans to first reach out to employees who hadn't met the requirement to determine whether they are vaccinated or exempt. From there, it can suspend workers without pay and eventually terminate them, according to the governor's office.

The prison-workers union said in a court filing that roughly 40% of members were unvaccinated last Wednesday. Mr. Baker, a Republican, last week said he was activating up to 250 Massachusetts National Guard personnel to help cover potential prison staffing shortages.

President Biden said in September that federal employees must be fully vaccinated by Nov. 22 or face discipline, up to termination. The Labor Department's Occupational Safety and Health Administration is crafting rules that will require private-sector workers at firms with 100 or more employees to be vaccinated or regularly tested for Covid-19.

Kris Maher and Zusha Elinson contributed to this article.

Write to Jimmy Vielkind at Jimmy.Vielkind@wsj.com, Christine Mai-Duc at christine.maiduc@wsj.com and Jon Kamp at jon.kamp@wsj.com

New York City Issues Covid-19 Vaccine Mandate for All Public Employees

Credit: By Jimmy Vielkind, Christine Mai-Duc and Jon Kamp

DETAILS

Subject:	Municipal employees; Fires; Federal employees; COVID-19 vaccines; Immunization; Coronaviruses; Deadlines
Location:	Chicago Illinois New York City New York United States--US San Francisco California
Publication title:	Wall Street Journal (Online); New York, N.Y.

Publication year:	2021
Publication date:	Oct 20, 2021
column:	U.S. News
Section:	US
Publisher:	Dow Jones &Company Inc
Place of publication:	New York, N.Y.
Country of publication:	United States, New York, N.Y.
Publication subject:	Business And Economics
e-ISSN:	25749579
Source type:	Newspaper
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News
ProQuest document ID:	2583396424
Document URL:	https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/new-york-city-issues-covid-19-vaccine-mandate-all/docview/2583396424/se-2?accountid=44910
Copyright:	Copyright 2021 Dow Jones &Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
Last updated:	2021-10-21
Database:	U.S. Major Dailies

Database copyright © 2021 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

[Terms and Conditions](#) [Contact ProQuest](#)