US mandates COVID-19 shots for federal health care workers

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The US health department said Thursday it will require all its public-facing health care workers to get vaccinated against COVID-19, amid a surge in hospitalizations driven by the Delta variant of the novel coronavirus.

The policy will apply to around 25,000 Department of Health and Human Services employees who could come into contact with patients—just under a third of its total workforce.

"Our number one goal is the [health](#) and safety of the American public, including our federal workforce. And vaccines are the best tool we have to protect people from COVID-19, prevent the spread of the Delta variant, and save lives," HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra said in a statement.

The HHS is the third federal department to introduce a vaccine mandate, following similar edicts from the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Pentagon in recent weeks.

President Joe Biden announced in July that all [federal employees](#) must attest to being vaccinated or face tough restrictions such as regular testing.

The latest announcement also applies to health care and research staff at the Indian Health Service and National Institutes of Health who come into contact with patients, as well as contractors and volunteers.

COVID-19 vaccines are free and widely available in the United States, yet only half the population is fully vaccinated.

Propelled by the highly-contagious Delta variant, coronavirus infections have soared to a daily average of more than 100,000, a level not seen since the winter surge.

Average daily hospital admissions in the week to August 3 were 7,707—a 40 percent jump in just one week, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"As President Biden has said, we have to do all we can to increase vaccinations to keep more people safe," Becerra added.

"Instructing our HHS [health care](#) workforce to get vaccinated will protect our federal workers and the patients and people they serve."

The requirement is expected to go into effect by the end of September, US media outlets reported.

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