



## **Frequently Asked Questions about Vaccine Policy For Health Care Workers, Providers and Facilities Employee Version**

### **1. Under what authority is the State of Rhode Island issuing this policy?**

The authority was issued through the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) as an emergency regulation. A link to this regulation is provided [here](#) and all employees are encouraged to thoroughly read this regulation.

### **2. Specifically, who is covered by this policy?**

All state health care workers at RIDOH-licensed state health care facilities (Eleanor Slater Hospital, the State Health Laboratories and the Veterans Home) are covered by this policy, as well as licensed health care providers at all other state facilities are covered by this policy and must be vaccinated by October 1, 2021.

### **3. What is the definition of a health care worker?**

A “health care worker” is any person employed at a RIDOH-licensed state health care facility who may have direct contact with a patient OR may not be directly involved in patient care but can be potentially exposed, in the course of employment, to infectious agents that can be transmitted from person to person.

### **4. What is the definition of a health care provider?**

A “health care provider” is any person licensed by RIDOH to provide or otherwise lawfully provide health care services provided the individual is either directly involved in patient care or potentially exposed to infectious agents that can be transmitted from person to person.

### **5. How will I know if I am considered a health care provider or health care worker and fall under this policy?**

A letter from the Department of Administration will be sent to all employee's homes who have been identified as falling under the RIDOH regulation. You can also review the [RIDOH regulation](#) which provides a comprehensive list of persons who may fall into these categories. Finally, you can also reach out to your supervisor for clarification, and you should do so as soon as possible to ensure you are prepared for the testing and vaccine requirements if you are covered by the policy.

**6. I am a consultant, temporary services employee and/or a volunteer – do I fall under the policy?**

Under the RIDOH regulations, a health care worker is any person who is temporarily or permanently employed by or at a RIDOH-licensed state health care facility, including volunteers. A health care provider is an individual who is licensed by RIDOH and provides health care services. If you are a consultant, temporary employee or a volunteer and you fall into the category of a health care worker or a health care provider, you are covered by this policy.

**7. What is required of employees covered by this policy by October 1, 2021?**

Employees must receive their final dose of a COVID-19 vaccine authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or the World Health Organization (WHO), or otherwise approved by RIDOH (e.g., Novavax) by October 1, 2021. *Please note this is not the same as being "fully vaccinated," which is 14 days after the final dose is administered.*

**8. Are there any exemptions?**

Yes, there is a medical exemption. There are no religious exemptions. If you have a question regarding a religious exemption, you should call DOA Human Resources at 401-222-2160 or send an email to [doa.hrcontact@hr.ri.gov](mailto:doa.hrcontact@hr.ri.gov).

**9. How do I receive approval for a medical exemption?**

If an individual has a medical condition which prevents them from being able to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, they must complete a [medical exemption form](#) provided by a licensed physician, physician assistant or advanced practice registered nurse, stating that the individual is exempt from the requirement because of medical reasons in accordance with the Advisory Committee on

Immunization Practices Guidelines. This form must be submitted for review and approval in order to achieve medical exemption status.

State employees must submit the exemption to the Division of Human Resources Disability Management Unit (DMU) no later than September 15, 2021.

**10. What notification will I receive after submitting the exemption?**

If the medical exemption is verified and approved, the employee will be provided notice of approval from DMU. If the medical exemption request is determined by DMU, in conjunction with RIDOH, to not be medically necessary, the individual will be required to be vaccinated by October 1, 2021.

Twice weekly COVID-19 testing for medically exempt individuals will continue throughout the duration of the applicability of this policy.

**11. What additional requirements, if any, are there if I am not vaccinated from now until October 1, 2021?**

Health care workers who work in a RIDOH-licensed health care facility who are not vaccinated are required to be tested at least two (2) times per week via any COVID-19 test authorized by the FDA.

Health care providers who do not work in a licensed health care facility and are not vaccinated DO NOT need to be tested twice a week, though regular testing is encouraged.

Until October 1, 2021, health care workers AND health care providers who are not vaccinated must wear a procedure mask or higher-grade mask (e.g., KN95 or N95) that will be provided by your employer for the duration of every shift.

**12. What types of face coverings do I wear if I am vaccinated?**

Employees should wear the face coverings as directed by their agency leadership.

And, as reminder to all employees who do not fall under this policy, masks are required in all state facilities detailed in the [COVID-19 Policy](#).

**13. Where do I get tested if I am not vaccinated?**

A testing clinic will be available on-site for individuals who work at a RIDOH-licensed state health care facility.

**14. When do I get tested (i.e. is it the same two days every week) if I am not vaccinated?**

Employees must get tested any two days of the week at the start of their shift so long as they do not get tested on consecutive days (i.e. not get tested Monday and Tuesday in the same week). In terms of the days of week to be tested, employees should contact their agency leadership to find out what testing protocols have been set up at their specific facility.

**15. Do I need to get tested if I am teleworking?**

Health care workers who are exclusively teleworking do not need to get tested; however, if the employee needs to come to their RIDOH-licensed state health care facility, they need to get tested before their shift.

If an employee is teleworking more than two days in a seven-day period, they are only required to be tested once that week. They must be tested the first day back at the worksite.

**16. Do I need to get tested while discharging paid leave?**

If an employee is absent for more than two days in a seven-day period, they are only required to be tested once that week. If they are absent for an entire work week, they will not be required to be tested that week. But in either situation, they must be tested on the first day they return to work.

**17. Do I need to discharge my paid leave for the time used to get tested?**

No, employees must get tested at the beginning of their shift.

**18. What do I do if my test is positive?**

If the test result is positive, the individual must leave the testing site immediately and follow the procedures in the State's COVID-19 Policy, to include following isolation requirements.

**19. What happens if I am not vaccinated and choose not to participate in the testing?**

Health care workers who refuse to take a twice weekly COVID-19 test will be sent home on leave without pay for the remainder of the day (first occurrence) for failing to comply with a legally mandated condition of employment.

They will be expected to report to work at their next scheduled shift and obtain a test before the start of their shift. If they refuse a test on this day as well, they will be sent home on leave without pay for the remainder of the day (second occurrence).

They will be expected to report to work at their next scheduled shift and obtain a test before the start of their shift (third occurrence). If they refuse a test on this third day, it will result in further appropriate disciplinary action up to and including termination, for failing to meet legally mandated conditions of employment. Any termination requires the approval of the Director of Administration.

**20. If I am already vaccinated at the issuance of this policy, do I need to show anyone my proof of vaccination?**

For individuals who are already vaccinated against COVID-19 in the State of Rhode Island, they must provide proof of said status in the form of a vaccination card by scanning and uploading a copy of their vaccination card to the designated confidential email address at the agency in which they work, or by providing a copy of the vaccination card to the designated individual at the agency in which they work.

Individuals who were vaccinated outside of the State of Rhode Island must complete the form at <http://health.ri.gov/forms/records/COVID-Immunization-Record-Correction-Request.pdf> as proof of vaccination and email the completed form to RIDOH.RICAIR@health.ri.gov no later than October 1, 2021. They must also provide proof of said status in the form of a vaccination card by scanning and uploading a copy of their vaccination card to the designated confidential email address at the agency in which they work, or by providing a copy of the vaccination card to the designated individual at the agency in which they work.

**21. If I become vaccinated from now until October 1, 2021, do I need to show anyone my proof of vaccination?**

For individuals who are currently in the process of being vaccinated (i.e., have received one dose of a two-dose vaccine) as of the issuance of this policy but will have received all required doses as of October 1, 2021, the same proof requirements as outlined Question 20 apply.

## **22. What happens if I do not feel well enough to work after receiving my vaccination?**

If an individual who receives a vaccination dose, on or after the effective date of this policy, has a short-term adverse reaction following the administration of the vaccine, they must inform their supervisor that they cannot report to work and the individual will be authorized to remain out of work, for a period of up to three (3) days under paid administrative leave provided that the individual submits proper medical documentation to DMU.

If an individual who receives a vaccination dose on or after the effective date of this policy has an adverse reaction for more than three (3) days, the individual may file a claim for workers' compensation benefits.

## **23. What are the consequences if I am not vaccinated by October 1, 2021?**

If an individual is not vaccinated as of October 1, 2021, they cannot enter a RIDOH-licensed state health care facility and/or provide services as a licensed health care provider.

They will be placed on leave without pay for a maximum period of seventy-five (75) calendar days beginning on October 1, 2021, to provide them the time necessary to become vaccinated.

If by December 15, 2021, the individual is unable to provide proof of vaccination status, they will be subject to progressive discipline, up to and including termination for failing to meet legally mandated conditions of employment. Any termination requires the approval of the Director of Administration.

If an employee is in the process of being vaccinated (they have received one dose of a two-dose vaccine) but will not have received all required doses as of October 1, 2021, they cannot enter a RIDOH-licensed state health care facility and/or provide services as a licensed health care provider, but they may choose to use any of their accrued time or be placed on leave without pay until they receive their second dose.

## **24. Am I eligible for unemployment benefits if I am terminated for declining to be vaccinated?**

Terminated employees likely are not due any unemployment checks, although each claim is evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Failing to comply with a clearly and timely articulated vaccine requirement would likely, in most cases, be considered a knowing violation of a reasonable employer policy, which could disqualify an individual from receiving unemployment insurance.