

From: US Department of Veterans Affairs <US.VA@va.gov>
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To: VA All Mailboxes <VAAll.Mailboxes@va.gov>
Subject: MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY: Vaccine

MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY

Vaccine

On Wednesday, July 28, 2021, we are making COVID-19 vaccines mandatory for Title 38 Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care personnel—including physicians, dentists, podiatrists, optometrists, registered nurses, physician assistants, expanded-function dental auxiliaries and chiropractors—who work in Veterans Health Administration (VHA) facilities, visit VHA facilities or provide direct care to those we serve. Each employee will have 8 weeks to be fully vaccinated.

Above all else, I'm doing this because it's the best way to keep the Nation's Veterans and our employees safe.

Any unvaccinated employees who interact with Veterans right now are putting those Veterans at risk—and that's a risk we simply cannot take. Since the pandemic began, we have lost tens of thousands of Veterans to this deadly disease. The risks are even higher now due to the Delta variant, which has claimed the lives of at least three of the four VA employees we've lost to COVID in recent weeks and spurred a large outbreak among unvaccinated employees at a VA Law Enforcement Training facility. This variant is more transmissible, more likely to lead to hospitalizations and less responsive to treatments than previous variants—which makes the unvaccinated among us more vulnerable, more likely to become first infected and more likely to spread the infection to others.

The vaccine can help us prevent these tragedies by providing strong protection against COVID-19 transmissions, hospitalizations and deaths. Nearly every person dying from COVID-19 right now is unvaccinated—which means that from now on, almost every COVID-19 death is preventable. That is why Title 38 employees must be vaccinated.

More information is coming soon about the mandate implementation, including specifics about how to report your COVID-19 vaccinations while addressing privacy concerns. I've shared the policy with our Union partners and want to give them time to share any potential ideas they have before sharing it with you as final. For now, I want you to know that I did not make this decision lightly. I have discussed this mandate extensively with leaders at VHA, the Veterans Benefits Administration and the National Cemetery Administration, as well as leading health care experts—all of whom agreed that this is the best course of action to protect the Nation's Veterans and their families. Mandates are supported by many national medical organizations, including the [American Hospital Association](#), [America's Essential Hospitals](#) and a [multi-society group of the leading Infectious Disease Societies](#). Today, the American Medical Association,

American Nurses Association, American College of Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, Association of American Medical Colleges and National Association for Home Care and Hospice also [endorsed mandating COVID-19 vaccination for health care workers](#).

So please, if you have not already been vaccinated, do so as soon as you can. All VA employees are eligible to be vaccinated without charge at any of our [facilities](#). You will receive 4 hours of paid administrative leave after demonstrating that you have been vaccinated. And if you have any outstanding questions about the vaccine, you can find more information about its safety and effectiveness in [these FAQs](#) or view clinician and Veteran videos [here](#).

The bottom line is that we cannot provide the best care and services to the Nation's Veterans if we do not first care for ourselves. Whenever a Veteran or teammate sets foot in a VA facility, they deserve to know we have done everything in our power to keep them safe. With this mandate, we can once again make—and keep—that fundamental promise.

Thank you to those of you who have already been vaccinated, and to those of you who will get vaccinated now. There is no better way to keep Veterans or our colleagues safe.

Denis McDonough

PLEASE PRODUCE LOCALLY FOR ALL THOSE WHO DO NOT ROUTINELY ACCESS EMAIL DUE TO THEIR SPECIALTIES.