



KENTUCKY HOSPITAL, MEDICAL AND NURSING ASSOCIATIONS SUPPORT COVID-19 VACCINE REQUIREMENTS

Kentucky hospitals, physicians and nurses are putting patients first by joining together to call for employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19. The Kentucky Hospital Association (KHA), the Kentucky Medical Association (KMA) and the Kentucky Nurses Association (KNA) support hospitals and health systems amending their existing vaccine policies to require COVID-19 vaccines for their health care employees. The associations recognize that each hospital and health system is unique and encourage each hospital and health system to determine the appropriate timeline to implement a requirement.

Restoring, preserving and protecting the health of patients is the highest priority for Kentucky's hospitals and physicians. Vaccination against COVID-19 is the best tool to prevent spread of the disease, protect patients and ensure the health and well-being of the hospital workforce and all Kentuckians.

The evidence clearly shows that the COVID-19 vaccines are safe and highly effective in preventing individuals from dying from the virus, becoming seriously ill, requiring hospitalization and spreading it to others. Hospitalizations from COVID-19 in Kentucky dropped dramatically once the COVID-19 vaccine became available. However, large segments of the population remain unvaccinated and continue to be at high risk of acquiring and transmitting COVID-19. At the same time, the emergence of COVID-19 variants is accelerating spread of infection and causing cases and hospitalizations to rise among the unvaccinated population. According to the Kentucky Department for Public Health, from April through June of 2021, 97% of positive tests, 93% of hospitalizations and 92% of deaths were in unvaccinated persons.

Recently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and many groups representing health care organizations and medical professionals have called for COVID-19 vaccine requirements for health care workers. Hospitals already require their employees to be vaccinated against other highly communicable diseases to protect patients. Nationally, more than 96% of physicians are vaccinated against COVID-19. For health care workers, the vaccine is important to protect against the virus and the inadvertent spread of COVID-19 to other staff, patients and visitors. This is particularly important to assure that the vulnerable patients hospitals serve, particularly those with weakened immune systems, the elderly, infants and children, are protected.

The Kentucky Hospital Association and the Kentucky Medical Association continue to be vocal supporters of the COVID-19 vaccine, having joined together for the "Take It From Me" public health campaign, and the Kentucky Nurses Association is proud to promote its "I Got the Shot" campaign. Both efforts encourage Kentuckians to receive the vaccine as soon as they are eligible. Vaccination of employees against COVID-19 will help assure that hospitals are able to continue to respond to the pandemic.

GUIDANCE FOR HOSPITALS THAT REQUIRE VACCINATION

KHA, KMA and KNA encourage hospitals that require vaccinations to:

- Develop a process for determining appropriate medical and religious exemptions, consistent with applicable laws;

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GUIDANCE FOR HOSPITALS THAT REQUIRE VACCINATION - CONTINUED

- Continue to educate hesitant staff and others in your community about the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines;
- Follow relevant CDC and other federal and state guidance regarding infection control practices for unvaccinated staff;
- Announce such a requirement in advance and offer scheduling flexibility to ensure personnel have paid time to obtain the vaccine and recover from potential side effects; and
- Work through their human resources and legal departments when determining and implementing the consequences of noncompliance with the hospital's vaccine policy.