



NATIONAL SAFETY COUNCIL

Position/Policy Statement

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic Viruses

As of August 25, 2021, the following information is the most up-to-date information regarding the SARS-CoV-2 (novel coronavirus) pandemic. Given this, the National Safety Council has developed policy positions reflecting the most recent data and information. These may change over time as more information is learned.

POSITION/POLICY:

The National Safety Council (NSC) urges employers to implement a COVID-19 vaccination requirement for their workers, with exemptions allowed for medical and religious purposes as required by law, based on the risk of transmission in the workplace. NSC urges employer to implement additional measures to protect those workers who are unable to be vaccinated.

NSC urges the federal and state governments to implement policies to encourage vaccine uptake, including by requiring their own workers be vaccinated, removing prohibitions or barriers to vaccine requirements, including expedited full approval of vaccines and allowing for employer-provided incentives to employees who become vaccinated.

NSC also supports additional data-driven mitigation efforts, including use of well-fitting multi-layered face masks, social distancing, increased ventilation when indoors, sanitization provisions and other non-pharmaceutical interventions for all populations across all ages, vaccination or health status. Additionally, employers should develop quarantine policies and processes for exposed or infected individuals and evaluate remove work options, where available. Encouraging workers to stay home when they are ill is another way to limit transmission of the virus.

JUSTIFICATION:

SARS-CoV-2

Late in 2019, a novel coronavirus was first identified in Wuhan, China. It was called “novel” because it is a new coronavirus for humans. It is abbreviated as SARS-CoV-2 and causes the disease COVID-19 (CO=corona VI=virus D=disease and 19 refers to the year it was identified).¹

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#Coronavirus-Disease-2019-Basics>

On March 11, 2020, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic.² As of August 24, 2021, the pandemic is still ongoing, with 212,357,898 cases and 4,439,843 deaths confirmed worldwide.³

People who have COVID-19 pose a direct threat to the health of others, including in workplaces. The United States leads the world in the number of confirmed cases at 35,824,258 and 614,856 deaths as of August 9, 2021.⁴ More state-by-state data can be found on the CDC website [here](#).⁵

The virus is spread through breathing in air when close to an infected person who is exhaling small droplets and particles that contain the virus, through respiratory droplets from an infected person through a sneeze or cough and through touching eyes, nose, or mouth with hands that have the virus on them.⁶ Nearly 60% of SARS-CoV-2 transmission is from presymptomatic or asymptomatic infected people, which means individuals who have no symptoms can spread the virus.⁷

Symptoms of COVID-19, which may appear 2-14 days after exposure, may include

- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fever
- Chills
- Muscle or body aches
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Congestion or runny nose
- New loss of taste or smell
- Intestinal symptoms of nausea, vomiting, diarrhea⁸

Some people are at a higher risk for experiencing severe symptoms from the coronavirus. This includes people who are 65 years of age or older, people from racial and ethnic minority groups, people with disabilities and those of any age with underlying health conditions.⁹ These health conditions can include:

- Cancer
- Chronic kidney disease
- Chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
- Dementia and other neurological conditions
- Diabetes

² <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/pandemic-preparedness-workplace-and-americans-disabilities-act>

³ <https://covid19.who.int/>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-covid-spreads.html>

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https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2774707?utm_source=For_The_Media&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=ftm_links&utm_term=010721

⁸ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

⁹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>

- Down Syndrome
- Heart conditions
- Hemoglobin disease
- HIV infection
- Immunocompromised ailments
- Liver disease
- Overweight and obesity
- Pregnancy
- Smoking, current or former
- Solid organ or blood stem cell transplant
- Stroke or cerebrovascular disease
- Substance use disorders¹⁰

Variants

Since the emergence of SARS-CoV-2 in 2019, several variants of concern have been identified.¹¹ Virus mutations are a common occurrence, especially if a virus is widely circulating.¹² Examples of these mutations of SARS-CoV-2 include the Alpha variant, which was first identified in the United Kingdom, and the Beta variant, first identified in South Africa-- both in mid-2020.¹³ Both of these variants were found likely to increase the spread of the virus.¹⁴

The highly transmissible Delta variant is far more contagious and causes more serious illness than other COVID-19 variants.¹⁵ The Delta variant was initially identified in India in the fall of 2020 and has now spread around the globe, becoming the most common variant of the virus in many countries, including in the U.S., where it now accounts for an estimated 80% of cases.^{16,17} The Gamma variant was first identified in Brazil at the end of 2020.¹⁸ It likely spreads faster than other variants (with the exception of the Delta variant) but data suggests it does not cause more severe illness.¹⁹

As children in the U.S. are returning to school, the CDC reports nearly 1,600 children have been hospitalized with COVID-19 the first week of August 2021.²⁰ This is a new seven-day record and a 27% increase from the previous week. Some states are on the brink of having no space for children in hospitals as a result, and most of this spread is linked to the Delta variant.²¹

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/variant-info.html#Consequence>

¹² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/variant.html>

¹³ <https://www.who.int/en/activities/tracking-SARS-CoV-2-variants/>

¹⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/variant.html>

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/06/covid-charts-show-how-far-delta-variant-has-spread-around-the-world.html>

¹⁷ <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#variant-proportions>

¹⁸ <https://www.who.int/en/activities/tracking-SARS-CoV-2-variants/>

¹⁹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/variant.html>

²⁰ <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#new-hospital-admissions>

²¹ Ibid.

Vaccines

Vaccines are very effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalization and death and are currently the best tool to help end the pandemic.²² There are currently two vaccines that have received emergency use authorization (EUA) for COVID-19 in adults, and the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine received full FDA approval for people 16 years old and older as of August 23, 2021. The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine has EUA approval for people 12-15 years old too.

The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine and the Moderna vaccine, which require two doses, utilize mRNA technology, which works by instructing cells to make a harmless “spike protein,” which is found on the surface of the virus.²³ Our immune system recognizes that the protein does not belong in our bodies and builds an immune response.²⁴ The materials in these vaccines break down quickly, so they must be kept in very cold environments until they are ready to be administered.²⁵ mRNA technology has been studied for decades, and its use in vaccines is safe and effective.²⁶

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which is one dose, is an adenovirus, or viral vector vaccine. This vaccine takes an adenovirus which has been altered so that it does not cause illness, and adds the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein into its DNA, that when administered initiates an immune response that recognize the spike protein.²⁷ Viral vector vaccines are safe and effective.²⁸ This technology is based on stable DNA molecules, it does not require cold storage.²⁹ Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna received EUA in December 2020 and became available in January of 2021, and Johnson & Johnson received EUA February 2021, becoming available in March 2021.

Vaccines greatly reduce morbidity and mortality from COVID-19, including cases from the Delta variant.^{30,31} Data show there is a 25 fold decrease in hospitalizations and deaths in vaccinated versus unvaccinated individuals.³² While evidence shows that vaccinated individuals can still spread COVID-19, the transmission rate is lower.³³ Importantly, vaccinated individuals who become sick with COVID-19 experience less severe illness, are less likely to be hospitalized, and less likely to die from the virus.³⁴ The vaccination efficacy point estimates declined from 91% before predominance of the SARS-CoV-2 Delta variant to 66% since the SARS-CoV-2 Delta variant became predominant in a study looking at frontline workers; however, this trend should be interpreted with caution because vaccination efficacy might also be declining as time since

²² <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7034e1.htm>

²³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/mrna.html>

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2777172>

²⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/mrna.html>

²⁷ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2777172>

²⁸ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/mrna.html>

²⁹ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2777172>

³⁰ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7032e3.htm>

³¹ <http://www.healthdata.org/covid/covid-19-vaccine-efficacy-summary>

³² https://cdn.substack.com/image/fetch/f_auto,q_auto:good,fl_progressive:steep/https%3A%2F%2Fbucketeer-e05bbc84-baa3-437e-9518-adb32be77984.s3.amazonaws.com%2Fpublic%2Fimages%2F1056ebbe-9a28-4045-8fd1-0c9ed8666329_2048x1152.png

³³ https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7031e2.htm?s_cid=mm7031e2_w

³⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/fully-vaccinated-people.html>

vaccination increases and because of poor precision in estimates due to limited number of weeks of observation and few infections among participants.³⁵

Currently 50.2% of Americans are fully vaccinated (as of August 10, 2021),³⁶ and this vaccination rate is not high enough to prevent widespread transmission of the virus. To achieve herd immunity, estimates suggest at least 70%, and possibly as high as 90% of the U.S. population must be vaccinated.³⁷ In order to reach these percentages, we must overcome vaccine hesitancy and other barriers preventing people from receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

There are significant discrepancies between different demographics in vaccine uptake, including political affiliation, age, geography, education level and race. The Kaiser Family Foundation has extensive data on this topic.³⁸

Unvaccinated adults are more likely to say they are not worried about becoming sick or believe the vaccine is a bigger risk to their health.³⁹ Vaccine access and concerns about costs are other reasons people have given for not being vaccinated.⁴⁰ Increasing access to vaccines for vulnerable populations must continue to be a focus.

NSC urges government entities to provide updated, clear information on vaccines to improve the public's understanding of the safety and effectiveness of vaccination.

Role of Employers

Employers have a role to play in addressing many of the causes of vaccine hesitancy. They are a trusted source of information for Americans and can help to increase vaccine access and uptake, as well as help reduce vaccine hesitancy.⁴¹ Employers should implement the recommendations NSC and the Health Action Alliance have previously recommended to remove common barriers to vaccination, including:

- Providing paid time off for vaccination and recovery
- Offering scheduling and transportation support
- Coordinating on-site vaccination clinics
- Encouraging peer-to-peer communication
- Contacting state officials⁴²

Additionally, because the Delta variant has increased the urgency of ensuring Americans are vaccinated, employers should have the ability to require vaccinations for some or all of their workers. Many employers and governmental entities are already starting to require vaccines

³⁵ https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7034e4.htm?s_cid=mm7034e4_e&ACSTrackingID=USCDC_921-DM64319&ACSTrackingLabel=Early%20Release%20-%20Vol.%2070%2C%20August%2024%2C%202021&deliveryName=USCDC_921-DM64319

³⁶ https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations_vacc-total-admin-rate-total

³⁷ <https://www.houstonmethodist.org/blog/articles/2020/dec/herd-immunity-how-many-people-need-to-get-the-covid-19-vaccine/>

³⁸ <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/poll-finding/kff-covid-19-vaccine-monitor-july-2021/>

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/poll-finding/kff-covid-19-vaccine-monitor-april-2021/>

⁴¹ <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/news-polls/axios-ipsos-coronavirus-index>

⁴² <https://www.nsc.org/getmedia/bfa5e483-3ca6-4afe-b567-a237d7a7f1b7/recommended-actions.pdf>

(with exemptions for specific populations). For example, the federal government will require workers to be vaccinated or be tested weekly, and the Veterans Affairs Administration will require all healthcare workers to be vaccinated. The Department of Defense will require all service members to be vaccinated by mid-September. Private employers are also beginning to require vaccines, including Frontier Airlines, Google and Tyson Foods, and the Health Action Alliance is tracking more workplaces implementing vaccination requirements.^{43, 44} Additionally, some employers are requiring proof of vaccinations for new hires. As of August 7, 2021, job postings requiring vaccinations were up 90% compared with one month prior, with some sectors showing exponential increases like software development postings requiring vaccinations are up more than 10,000% in July from February 2021.⁴⁵

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has issued guidance approving employers requiring vaccinations for workers, provided the employer takes into consideration accommodations for employees who cannot be vaccinated due a disability, pregnancy or sincerely held religious belief.^{46, 47} The EEOC also provides information to employers about EEO laws related to the coronavirus at www.eeoc.gov/coronavirus. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Justice has provided a legal opinion that employers can require the coronavirus vaccine in its current state with an emergency use authorization.⁴⁸

NSC supports the implementation of other data-driven mitigation tools as necessary. Because vaccinated individuals can still transmit the virus, the CDC recommends that people wear masks when in indoor settings.⁴⁹ Masks are designed to protect oneself and others from getting and spreading COVID-19.⁵⁰ Continued use of masks will be necessary until vaccination rates are much higher. Studies show that widespread use of masks can reduce the transmission of COVID-19.⁵¹ Widespread masking can help keep workers at work, students in school and businesses open. Many school districts are mandating masks as a way to prevent outbreaks and allow for students to learn in-person. Robust testing programs should be utilized in conjunction with other efforts to help quickly identify new cases.

Other CDC recommendations include:

- Avoid crowds and close contact (within 6 feet for a cumulative 15 minutes in a 24 hour period) with people outside of your household
- Avoid poorly ventilated spaces
- Cover all coughs and sneezes
- Throw away the tissue
- Wash hands often
- Avoid being in public, including going to work, when sick

⁴³ <https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2021-08-07/list-employers-with-covid-19-vaccine-mandates>

⁴⁴ <https://www.healthaction.org/resources/vaccines/covid-19-vaccines-employer-requirements-health-action-alliance>

⁴⁵ https://www.hiringlab.org/2021/08/12/job-postings-requiring-vaccination-climb/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axioswhatsnext&stream=science

⁴⁶ The CDC does recommend vaccination while pregnant and breast-feeding, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/pregnancy.html>

⁴⁷ <https://www.eeoc.gov/newsroom/eeoc-issues-updated-covid-19-technical-assistance>

⁴⁸ <https://www.justice.gov/olc/file/1415446/download>

⁴⁹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

⁵⁰ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/types-of-masks.html>

⁵¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/masking-science-sars-cov2.html>

- Monitor your health daily
- Clean and disinfect surfaces regularly, especially high-touch areas like door knobs and light switches.⁵² [Here](#) is a list of household disinfectants from the EPA.⁵³

Evidence of Employer Requirement Efficacy

This policy recommendation is, in part, based on compelling evidence of the efficacy of employer vaccine requirements in increasing COVID-19 vaccine uptake in the U.S. workforce. NSC conducted a total of three nationwide surveys in June and July of 2021 to study vaccine policies across U.S.-based employers, as well as vaccine hesitancy and uptake among American adults. In late June, NSC surveyed 302 representatives of U.S.-based organizations about their pandemic response, and 2,403 U.S. workers about their experience working during the pandemic, their perception of their employer’s COVID-19 response, and their opinions about COVID-19 vaccination. In late July, an additional 1,382 U.S. adults who work (either within or outside the home, paid or unpaid) were surveyed about vaccine uptake and hesitancy.

Survey responses indicated that at the end of June, 20% of organizations surveyed had implemented vaccine requirements for some or all workers, and 8% of individual workers surveyed said their employer required them to provide proof of vaccination. By the end of July, 17% of workers surveyed said that their job required them to be vaccinated, and 32% of college students said their school required it.

Results of the NSC surveys demonstrated that employer vaccine requirements promoted a significant uptake between data collection points in late June and late July. In June, workers who reported that their employer was requiring vaccination had a vaccination rate of 85.8% compared to a 68.8% vaccination rate among workers whose employer did not require vaccination (compared to 54.5% of the general adult population). By late July, 93.6% percent of workers with a requirement reported they had been vaccinated, while only 69.1% of workers with no requirement had been vaccinated. Numbers include all respondents who have received at least one dose. These numbers indicate that while the working population already has a higher vaccination rate than the general population, the population of U.S. workers with a vaccine requirement are achieving levels of vaccination rates which will be necessary to reach herd immunity.

NSC acknowledges that some employers may not choose to require vaccinations because of potential labor shortages, however, recent data indicates broad acceptance of vaccine requirements among the workforce, particularly in younger generations. A recent poll found that 38% of workers would consider quitting their job if their employer did not impose a requirement, suggesting that a significant segment of the workforce is not comfortable working in proximity to unvaccinated individuals⁵⁴. This statistic correlates with age, with younger workers being more likely to leave a job if their employer does not require vaccination. In general, recent data shows 64-70% of Americans are in favor of requirements for adults, depending on the specific type of requirement, and those numbers have been trending upward⁵⁵.

⁵² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>

⁵³ <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>

⁵⁴ <https://qz.com/work/2045018/survey-shows-the-business-risk-of-not-adopting-a-vaccine-mandate/>

⁵⁵ <https://osf.io/6wcn9/>

With regard to the coronavirus, vaccines are the single most effective way to prevent transmission and deadly consequences if someone does become sick. It is worth reiterating that there is a 25 fold decrease in hospitalizations and deaths in vaccinated versus unvaccinated individuals.⁵⁶ As of August 25, 2021, 629,139 people in the U.S. have died from COVID-19.⁵⁷ Other impacts of COVID-19 include retail sales decreases of 8.7% from February to March 2020, the largest month-to-month decrease since these data collection started.⁵⁸ Employment losses in April 2020 amounted to 20.5 million jobs, which disproportionately impacted women, non-white, lower-wage, and less educated workers.⁵⁹ Healthcare workers are the most impacted from dealing with the pandemic and loss of these workers could have big impacts on healthcare services throughout the nation. A survey shows 62% of frontline healthcare workers have experienced negative mental health impacts as a result of dealing with the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and over 4 in 10 workers say their physical health and personal relationships have also been negatively impacted.^{60, 61}

In U.S. schools, the impact of COVID-19 was stark with K-12 students being five months behind in mathematics and four months behind in reading after the 2020-2021 school year, and more students dropped out of school and chose not to attend post-secondary school.⁶² Additionally, the pandemic has impacted the mental health of millions of people across all ages.⁶³ Given this, the evidence is overwhelming that vaccination requirements can help mitigate all these impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This position statement reflects the opinions of the National Safety Council but not necessarily those of each member organization.

Adopted by the National Safety Council, August 2021

⁵⁶ https://cdn.substack.com/image/fetch/f_auto,q_auto:good,fl_progressive:steep/https%3A%2F%2Fbucketeer-e05bbc84-baa3-437e-9518-adb32be77984.s3.amazonaws.com%2Fpublic%2Fimages%2F1056ebbe-9a28-4045-8fd1-0c9ed8666329_2048x1152.png

⁵⁷ https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases_totalcases

⁵⁸ <https://www.brookings.edu/research/ten-facts-about-covid-19-and-the-u-s-economy/>

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/press-release/kff-post-survey-reveals-the-serious-mental-health-challenges-facing-frontline-health-care-workers-a-year-into-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

⁶¹ NSC provides mental health resources for employers as a result of the impact of COVID-19,

<https://www.nsc.org/workplace/safety-topics/safer/mental-health-and-wellbeing>

⁶² <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-education-the-lingering-effects-of-unfinished-learning>

⁶³ <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>