

**The Following Communications was shared with OHSU Members on Sept. 22:**

## **Criteria for vaccine policy exceptions**

OHSU firmly stands behind the community benefit of vaccination against COVID-19. The decision not to get vaccinated can have negative consequences to the unvaccinated person and to those around them. State and federal officials have announced vaccination requirements for large employers across the country in large part to realize the community benefit.

To be compliant with OHSU's vaccination policy (and state law) by Oct. 18, you must either be fully vaccinated (14 days after your final vaccination dose) or have an approved medical or religious exception.

Exception requests were due in Enterprise Health on Monday, Sept. 20, and many of you have asked about the criteria for reviewing these. Thank you for your patience as OHSU's leadership and Vaccine Exception Review Panel have thoughtfully considered the possible personal, community and legal implications. This deliberate review has led to developing very narrow criteria for approving medical or religious exceptions at OHSU. You can [see the full guidance that the Vaccine Exception Review Panel will use on the COVID-19 O2 site's Vaccine page](#). However, we want to highlight a few of the key points for both types of exceptions.

We understand that some of you may not qualify for an exception based on these criteria. We are here to help. Our team can connect you with someone to help answer your questions. We want you to be compliant and we value you. We also need to ensure OHSU sets policy to protect our patients and our community.

We plan to share a matrix of what non-compliance will look like by employee group very soon.

### **Medical exceptions**

Medical exceptions will be allowed only for specific reasons consistent with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), including:

- Documented history of severe allergic reaction to one or more components of all three currently approved COVID-19 vaccines.
- Documented history of severe or immediate-type hypersensitivity allergic reaction to a COVID-19 vaccine, and separate contraindication to other available formulations.
- Individuals who have received monoclonal antibodies for the treatment or prophylaxis following exposure of COVID-19 for 90 days after administration.

Examples of conditions that would not qualify for a medical exception include:

- History of severe allergic reactions to foods, oral medications, latex, pets, insects and environmental triggers.
- Trypanophobia (fear of injections or needles).

- Previous history of normal vaccine side effects or general avoidance of vaccines.
- History of COVID-19 infection.
- Concerns that vaccination could exacerbate an autoimmune disorder.
- Routine requests because of pregnancy.

### **Religious exceptions**

In accordance with relevant federal and Oregon law, members who can demonstrate a sincerely held religious belief and past behavior consistent with that belief will be approved for an exception. Please be advised that social, political or economic philosophies or personal preferences are not considered to be religious beliefs. Examples of beliefs or past behavior that may disqualify an individual from receiving a religious exception include:

- Receiving another vaccine in the last five years.
- An objection to the vaccine on the basis of fetal cell concerns.
  - No fetal tissue or cells are contained in any of the vaccines currently available under FDA approval or emergency use authorization in the U.S.
  - While they played no role in their development or production, HEK-293 cell lines created over 50 years ago were used in confirmatory testing of the current mRNA vaccines. Cells from the same line have commonly been used in biologic research since the late 70s. This cell line is used in the testing of many common medicines, including Tylenol, Advil, Aspirin, Claritin, Benadryl, Pepto-Bismol, Mucinex, Tums and Prilosec, among many others.
  - Given the gravity of the pandemic and lack of alternative vaccines, both the Vatican and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops have endorsed the use of the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, despite their remote connection to fetal tissues. The president of the National Association of Evangelicals, and leadership of the Orthodox (Jewish) Union issued a joint statement encouraging their members to be vaccinated.

**Accommodations with an approved exception** If your exception is approved using this guidance, OHSU still must keep you, your colleagues and our patients safe. How we will achieve this will likely evolve as we learn more about how to best prevent the spread of COVID-19.

OHSU will endeavor to find accommodation for exempt, but unvaccinated employees that do not involve direct, in-person patient contact. In the event that an accommodation that maintains the safety of our patients and employees cannot be found, an employee may be placed on unpaid leave. As the situation evolves, OHSU will periodically assess whether and under what circumstances these employees might once again participate in patient care. Similarly, because of the current national public health emergency resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, OHSU will not place unvaccinated students in direct, in-person, patient contact for the foreseeable future. OHSU programs will endeavor to find reasonable accommodations for unvaccinated students who have received approved exceptions to try and support their degree progression while they are unable to engage in direct, in-person, patient contact. As the situation evolves, OHSU will periodically assess when and under what circumstances these students might once again participate in patient care activities.

If you have an approved exception, and work in an OHSU building, you currently will need to:

- Wear an approved and fit-tested respirator or the N95 or equivalent at all times, except when actively eating/drinking, in accordance with OHA requirements.
- Maintain physical distancing from others when indoors in a clinical area.
- Maintain at least 6-foot distance when actively eating/drinking and mask is removed.
- Wear a mask outdoors when 6-foot distance from others cannot be maintained.
- Get tested at least twice weekly.

**You can still get vaccinated** If you still need your vaccination, you can get one, no appointment needed, at these [OHSU pharmacy locations](#) during their open hours or you can find a [community location](#) near you. To be compliant with the policy by Oct. 18, you will need to receive the Johnson & Johnson vaccine by Oct. 4. Remember to enter your vaccination record in [Enterprise Health](#) as well.