

**As experts in healing and saving lives, hospitals must have the trust, respect and flexibility to manage vaccine requirements in their own facilities.** The people inside hospitals are unique and need to be protected – they are often elderly, pregnant or have other conditions that put them at greater risk.



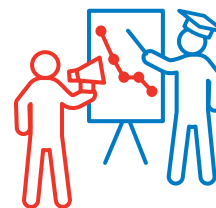
## **Fall 2023: Vaccine Flexibility at Risk for Hospitals**

Texas has called a third special session to allow for legislation prohibiting COVID-19 vaccine mandates by private employers. Private hospitals must be excluded from any prohibition so they have the flexibility to protect their employees and patients.

**Vaccines save lives.** Vaccines are one of the greatest life-saving inventions in human history. Innovations in vaccines have helped stop many diseases in their tracks. From polio to smallpox, vaccines protect patients, lessen disease spread and help prevent dangerous outbreaks.

### **Unfortunately:**

1. Vaccines have **become politicized.**
2. Vaccines work so well, **their importance is overlooked.**
3. Vaccine **misinformation is everywhere.**



## **Hospitals Are Trusted Safe Zones in Their Communities**

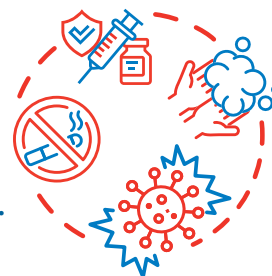
Hospitals save lives every day. They are a place of refuge, safety and care, whether that's in Midland, McAllen, Dallas or Dalhart.

Hospitals are a vibrant and critical part of their unique communities, and **hospitals make decisions every day** to ensure the safest possible environments for their employees and patients. This includes decisions about:

- Infection control
- Handwashing and masks
- Protective equipment
- Requiring flu vaccination of staff
- Instrument sterilization
- Prohibiting smoking

**Every hospital is different.** Every community is different. Hospitals should have the flexibility to make their own decisions about requiring COVID-19 vaccination of hospital staff. **A one-size-fits-all approach to health care does not work in Texas.**

As the saying goes, "If you've seen one hospital, you've seen *one* hospital!"



## **Hospitals Have a Duty to Follow Federal Quality Guidelines**

Hospitals rely heavily on their ability to receive Medicaid and Medicare payments for services, as allowed by the federal government. **The federal government has made it clear that it will continue to encourage COVID-19 vaccinations for hospital employees through quality reporting and value-based incentive programs.** Hospitals can – and do – offer certain exemptions for their employees, keeping them in line with both state and federal postures on COVID-19 vaccine mandates.

## Third Special Session: What's Happening?

Texas hospitals strongly oppose efforts underway to hamstring private entities – including hospitals – from being able to require vaccination of their own staff. In hospitals, many employees are at the bedside every day with children and adults who are vulnerable to COVID-19. Facing extreme workforce shortages, hospitals must be able to keep staff healthy and working.



### What's at Stake? If Texas Tells Hospitals They **Can't Require** COVID-19 Vaccination of Employees:

- COVID-19 may spread more easily, putting patients at risk.
- Texas hospitals could lose critical value-based payments through Medicare. Payments may be at risk.
- Hospitals may close from from workforce/financial strain, reducing access to care.
- Texas hospitals' quality rankings may go down.
- Texas hospitals may struggle to recruit workers.

## Exemptions Are Allowed

Right now, hospitals that require employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19 can and do offer **exemptions for those who do not want to be vaccinated** – for medical or religious reasons. Texas Health and Safety Code (Section 224, Policy on Vaccine Preventable Diseases) allows for exemptions for medical reasons, prohibits discrimination or retaliatory actions against exempt individuals, allows hospitals to provide exemptions for reasons of conscience including religious belief and subjects hospitals to administrative and civil penalties for violations.

## COVID-19 Vaccine Myths

MYTH

FACT

**Myth:** It's Dangerous.

**Fact:** Nearly all ingredients are also in many foods – fats, sugars and salts – and vaccines do not contain preservatives, tissues, latex or metals.



**Myth:** Getting Sick Provides Better Immunity.

**Fact:** Getting vaccinated is a safer and more dependable way to build immunity.



**Myth:** It's Not a Real Vaccine.

**Fact:** mRNA vaccines, like the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines, work differently than other vaccines but still trigger an immune response. COVID-19 is not the only mRNA vaccine. Influenza, rabies and Zika vaccines are also built with mRNA.



**Myth:** Vaccine Mandates Cause Staff Departures.

**Fact:** Vaccine-related issues are the least cited reasons for hospital staff departures. Burnout and fatigue top the list.



**Myth:** The Vaccine is Experimental.

**Fact:** The FDA has fully approved the updated mRNA COVID-19 vaccine for ages 12 and older for 2023-2024.



## Science Says

Americans who received an updated COVID-19 vaccine were **14 times less likely to die** than those who received no vaccine.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



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