



Title: Health Care Worker COVID-19 Vaccination	Policy #: EHA1046
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Section: Human Resources	Effective Date: 8/4/2021
Primary Author: Chief Human Resources Officer	***Revision Date:
Approval Body: *Essentia Health Leadership Team	Page 1 of 4

Scope: **Essentia Wide

Purpose:

- I. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) reported that, as of August 2021, more than 600,000 Americans died with COVID-19 and over 2 million COVID-19 positive individuals have been hospitalized since August 2020. These individuals include our patients, our colleagues, our community members, and our loved ones.
- II. As a health care organization, our obligation is to protect and serve those who come to us for care, always keeping our patients’ safety in mind. Essentia Health and Health Care Workers have a shared responsibility to take reasonable measures to avoid causing harm to patients and to prevent occupationally and community-acquired COVID-19 infections. Because of Health Care Worker contact with patients or infectious material from patients, many Health Care Workers are at risk for exposure to and transmission of vaccine-preventable diseases like COVID-19. The CDC recommends that all health care personnel get vaccinated against COVID-19. Widespread use of the COVID-19 vaccine will help maintain immunity within our communities and safeguard Health Care Workers from infection, thereby helping protect patients and community members from becoming infected.
- III. According to the CDC, the COVID-19 vaccines have proven to be safe and highly effective at preventing COVID-19 infection and preventing serious illness in the event a vaccinated individual contracts COVID-19. Vaccines are the most effective tool we have to end this pandemic, keep our patients and communities safe, and prevent further outbreaks. Numerous medical associations support employers’ decisions to require the COVID-19 vaccine for all health care workers.
- IV. In alliance with Essentia Health’s Aspirational Aim of “Zero Preventable Harm,” and to help protect Essentia Health staff, visitors, patients and families from acquiring and transmitting COVID-19, all Health Care Workers must be Fully Vaccinated against COVID-19 as a condition of employment and a condition of entering Essentia Health Facilities to perform services to or for Essentia Health.

Definitions:

- I. **Essentia Health Facility:** An Essentia Health Facility is a building or space that is wholly-owned, or that is leased or licensed, by Essentia Health.
- II. **Fully Vaccinated:** Fully Vaccinated means the Health Care Worker is 2 weeks out or more from receiving the final dose of a COVID–19 vaccine, per the manufacturer’s instructions. Being Fully Vaccinated means that the Health Care Worker has received all boosters that may be recommended within the timeframes specified by Essentia Health.

III. **Health Care Worker:** All Essentia Health employees (including remote workers) are Health Care Workers. Additionally, because of the potential for exposure to patients or other Health Care Workers and/or infectious materials, including bodily substances, contaminated medical supplies and equipment, contaminated environmental surfaces, or contaminated air, all other persons performing services to or for Essentia Health and who enter into an Essentia Health Facility shall be considered Health Care Workers (e.g., non-employed medical staff, contingent workers, volunteers, clergy, board members, residents, independent contractors, vendors,¹ students).

Policy:

- I. Being Fully Vaccinated is a condition of employment for all Health Care Workers employed by Essentia Health, except where prohibited by law. For all Health Care Workers who are not employees, being Fully Vaccinated is a condition of entering Essentia Health Facilities to perform services to or for Essentia Health. Essentia Health will grant religious and medical exemptions from this Policy as required by law.
 - a. By the date communicated by Essentia Health, all current Health Care Workers must either (1) provide documentation to Human Resources that they are Fully Vaccinated against COVID-19, (2) have an Essentia Health-approved exemption from the COVID-19 vaccine requirement, or (3) have a pending request for an exemption. Individuals who apply for and are denied an exemption must be Fully Vaccinated according to the timeline in their denial letter.
 - b. By the date communicated by Essentia Health, all Health Care Workers who are new to Essentia Health must either (1) provide documentation to Human Resources that they are Fully Vaccinated against COVID-19, (2) have at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and an appointment for a final dose (if applicable), or (3) request an exemption prior to commencing services for Essentia Health. Individuals who apply for and are denied an exemption must be Fully Vaccinated according to the timeline in their denial letter. Documentation demonstrating Full Vaccination must be provided.
- II. In the event that boosters are recommended for the COVID-19 vaccines, Health Care Workers must provide documentation demonstrating that they are Fully Vaccinated in accordance with timelines and means communicated by Essentia Health.
- III. Falsification of documentation or misrepresentation of a Health Care Worker's vaccination status will be grounds for termination of employment or services.

Procedure:

- I. All Health Care Workers must complete the COVID-19 vaccination survey distributed by Human Resources and attest to their vaccination status by the dates communicated by Essentia Health.
- II. Unless approved for an exemption, all Health Care Workers must submit documentation to Human Resources of their COVID-19 vaccine (e.g., image of their vaccine card, printout from MyChart). Essentia Health will handle medical information and documentation related to COVID-19 vaccine status in a confidential manner and all documentation will be kept separate from the Health Care Worker's personnel file.
- III. In order to facilitate obtaining a vaccine, Essentia Health will work with employees to ensure employees have access to obtain the vaccine. This may include granting time off or a temporary schedule change.
- IV. Fully Vaccinated Health Care Workers will be provided with a "COVID-19 Vaccine Clip" that must be attached to their identification badge. Health Care Workers without a COVID-19 Vaccine Clip must wear a mask whenever they are in Essentia Health facilities and in accordance with the guidance outlined in Section VI of this Policy.
- V. To assist any Health Care Worker who is disabled, who is pregnant, who is a nursing mother, who has a qualifying medical condition that contraindicates the vaccination, or who objects to being

¹ On a case-by-case basis, vendors may be permitted to mask in lieu of receiving a vaccination or showing proof of vaccination. In addition, until such time that Essentia Health determines otherwise, this policy does not apply to contractors working on the premises being constructed as part of Vision Northland. Please contact Employee Health with questions about vaccination requirements for vendors.

vaccinated on the basis of sincerely held religious beliefs and practices, Essentia Health will engage in an interactive process to determine if a reasonable accommodation can be provided so long as it does not create an undue hardship for Essentia Health and/or does not pose a direct threat to the health or safety of others in the workplace and/or to the Health Care Worker. Health Care Workers requesting a medical or religious exemption from the vaccination requirement must provide written documentation as set forth below no later than the date established by Employee Health or at the time of hire.

1. Medical Exemption

1. A Health Care Worker must submit to Essentia Health the Request for Medical Exemption from COVID-19 Vaccination form. This form shall be completed by the Health Care Worker, along with a form completed and signed by the individual's healthcare provider
2. Requests for an exemption will be reviewed by Essentia Health via its then-current medical exemption review process.
3. Completed requests for medical exemption will be documented in a Human Resources Database by Employee Health personnel.
4. Individuals granted a medical exemption may be required to wear a mask whenever they are in Essentia Health facilities in accordance with Section VI. Individuals with a medical exemption will not receive a COVID Vaccine Clip. Individuals with a medical exemption may be subject to routine COVID-19 testing, at the discretion of Essentia Health.

2. Religious Exemption

1. A Request for Exemption from COVID-19 vaccination for Religious Reasons form shall be completed and submitted to Essentia Health, attesting that receiving the vaccine conflicts with the individual's sincerely held religious beliefs.
2. Essentia Health will evaluate such requests pursuant to its then-current religious exemption review process and notify the individual within a reasonable time of the exemption determination.
3. Approved requests for religious exemption will be forwarded to Employee Health and documented in the COVID-19 Database.
4. Individuals granted a religious exemption may be required to wear a mask whenever they are in Essentia Health facilities in accordance with Section VI. Individuals with a religious exemption will not receive a COVID Vaccine Clip. Individuals with a religious exemption may be subject to routine COVID-19 testing, at the discretion of Essentia Health.

VI. Masking Protocols

Individuals without a COVID Vaccine Clip are required to wear a mask whenever they are in Essentia Health facilities. The following applies to individuals required to wear a mask:

- The mask should be continuously worn throughout the hours of work.
- Mask must cover the mouth and nose, do not wear mask pulled down below the nose.
- Masks must be worn any area where other co-workers, patients or visitors may be encountered, including breakrooms.
- Mask may be removed to eat or drink and must be replaced as soon as you are done eating or drinking. You should maintain six feet of distance from other individuals whenever your mask is removed. Follow doffing and donning processes.
- Staff working in an office setting not in a patient care area that has at least six feet of space maintained between workstations may remove their mask while working, but must do it promptly if approached by others or if they leave the area.

VII. Any Health Care Worker who fails to comply with its provisions will be prohibited from working or providing services within an Essentia Health Facility and may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment and termination of ability to perform services to or for Essentia Health.

VIII. Essentia Health will report de-identified vaccination rates, declinations and reasons, and non-compliance data as requested and required by regulatory agencies.

References:

<https://data.cdc.gov/NCHS/Provisional-COVID-19-Death-Counts-by-Week-Ending-D/r8kw-7aab>
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/hcp.html>
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/safety-of-vaccines.html>

*****Previous Revision dates:**

Approval Dates:

*Approved by EHLT on August 30, 2021

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**Scope: Unless otherwise indicated above, this Policy, Standard Work/Procedure, or Protocol (collectively "P&P") applies to Essentia Health and all Essentia Health Entities and their subsidiaries including, but not limited to, the following:

Brainerd Lakes Integrated Health System, dba Essentia Health Central

- Brainerd Medical Center, dba Essentia Health Brainerd Specialty Clinic
- St. Joseph's Medical Center, dba Essentia Health St. Joseph's Medical Center

St. Mary's Duluth Clinic Health System, dba Essentia Health East

- Deer River Healthcare Center, Inc., dba Essentia Health Deer River
- Essentia Health Virginia, LLC, dba Essentia Health Virginia
- Northern Pines Medical Center, dba Essentia Health Northern Pines
- Pine Medical Center, dba Essentia Health Sandstone
- SMDC Medical Center, dba Essentia Health Duluth
- St. Mary's Hospital of Superior, dba Essentia Health St. Mary's Hospital-Superior
- St. Mary's Medical Center, dba Essentia Health St. Mary's Medical Center

Innovis Health, LLC, dba Essentia Health West

- Bridges Medical Center, dba Essentia Health Ada
- First Care Medical Services, dba Essentia Health Fosston
- Graceville Health Center, dba Essentia Health Holy Trinity Hospital
- Innovis Health, LLC, dba Essentia Health Fargo
- St. Mary's Regional Health Center, dba Essentia Health St. Mary's-Detroit Lakes

Critical Access Group