Beth Israel Lahey Health

BILH Vaccine Requirements for COVID-19 and Flu Manager Questions and Answers

Why is BILH planning to require that all staff be vaccinated against COVID-19 and influenza?

As a health care organization, we have a responsibility to do everything we can to protect our patients, our colleagues and our communities. We are also an organization grounded in the science and art of medicine and in data, which have demonstrated that vaccines are effective and safe. Accordingly, we have to show leadership in conveying the importance of taking personal and collective responsibility based on science.

When will staff need to obtain their COVID-19 and influenza vaccines?

All clinicians, staff, volunteers, contractors and colleagues working on behalf of BILH will be required to be vaccinated against COVID-19 and influenza by October 31. COVID-19 vaccines are available now through BILH Employee Health and in the community. BILH will host influenza vaccination clinics in October. It is important to note that being fully vaccinated for COVID-19 requires staff to complete their vaccinations by October 31.

The Moderna COVID-19 vaccine requires two doses four weeks apart, and the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine requires two doses three weeks apart. The Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine only requires one dose. The latest date for first doses of COVID-19 is below:

- Moderna: Sunday, October 3 (first of two doses)
- Pfizer-BioNTech: Sunday, October 10 (first of two doses)
- Janssen/Johnson & Johnson (one dose vaccine): Sunday, October 31 (single dose)

What is my role as a manager to support the vaccination requirement?

Your role in this effort is similar to your broad responsibilities as a leader – to ensure your staff are aware of the policy, understand the policy and why it is being implemented, and know where to go for more information and resources.

- **Awareness:**Ensure your staff have seen the announcement and video message from BILH President and CEO Kevin Tabb, MD, and understand what is happening and why.
- **Recognize concerns:**Understand that some members of your staff may have concerns about getting vaccinated and/or may seek exemptions.
- **Share resources:**Encourage staff to learn more by visiting the BILH COVID-19 staff website, contacting BILH Employee Health, and/or speaking with their personal primary care doctor and/or community leaders.
- **Ask questions:**Reach out to your local Employee Health leader with your questions and feedback so that you have the information you need to support your staff

- **Continue to reinforce staff and patient safety:**Continue to ensure that your team follows current safety guidelines. Masking and daily symptom reporting are still required. Please continue to reinforce these requirements and encourage staff to physically distance at their personal comfort level to protect themselves and those around them.

What is the process for staff to report getting vaccinated for COVID-19 elsewhere – not at a BILH employee vaccination clinic?

If members of your staff received a COVID-19 vaccine outside of a BILH employee vaccination clinic, including at a BILH patient vaccination clinic, you they will need to submit documentation.They can submit documentation to Employee Health via the Vaccinated Elsewhere Verification Form at forms.bilh.org/htm/vaccinesurvey.html. They can also send documentation to their hospital or business unit's Employee Health team or email BILH Employee Health at employeehealth@bilh.org. They should include their full name, hospital or business unit, department, manager's name, and employee ID number (if known) on the vaccine documentation.If there is no vaccination information on file for you or a member of your staff, Employee Health will also contact the individual by email to complete their vaccination information.

What if a member of my staff received a COVID-19 vaccine outside of the United States?

For guidelines on any COVID-19 vaccines administered internationally, please refer to current BILH Guidance for Individuals Who Have Received COVID-19 Vaccine Outside the United States (covid-19.bilh.org/wp-content/uploads/bilh-guidance-covid-19-vaccine-outside-us.pdf). BILH will accept vaccines listed for emergency use by the World Health Organization (extranet.who.int/pqweb/sites/default/files/documents/Status_COVID_VAX_28May2021.pdf) or authorized by the FDA: Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech and Janssen/Johnson & Johnson. Staff members can submit documentation to Employee Health via the Vaccinated Elsewhere Verification Form at forms.bilh.org/htm/vaccinesurvey.html. They can also send documentation to their hospital or business unit's Employee Health team or email BILH Employee Health at employeehealth@bilh.org. They should include their full name, hospital or business unit, department, manager's name, and employee ID number (if known) on the vaccine documentation.

Are staff who work fully remote or who do not have patient contact included in the vaccination requirement?

Yes, all staff are required to be vaccinated against COVID-19 and flu by October 31, regardless of whether their role is patient-facing or non-patient-facing. Staff working remotely are also required to be vaccinated.

A member of my staff is on leave or will be going out on leave around the time of the October 31 vaccination deadline. How will they stay in compliance?

Any staff member who is out on leave will need to complete their vaccination before returning to work.

Members of my staff are represented by a collective bargaining agreement. Does the vaccine policy affect them?

For staff represented by a labor union and subject to a collective bargaining agreement, we will be discussing the policy with their union and will comply with any applicable bargaining obligations. We look forward to their partnership to ensure the safety of all of our staff and patients.

What is the requirement for new hires?

As of September 1, all new hires will either need to have completed or be in progress of completing COVID-19 vaccination in order to start employment. Influenza vaccination will be required as part of the onboarding process for all new hires as of October 1.

Does the vaccination policy apply to non-employees as well?

Yes, anyone who performs work onsite at a BILH facility will be required to be vaccinated against COVID-19 and influenza, regardless of whether they are employed by BILH. This includes physicians, interns, students, volunteers, those employed by third-party vendors, and others.

Will staff be able to apply for an exemption to the vaccine requirement?

Applications for medical or religious exemption are due October 1 and will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Exemption applications are available on your organization's intranet or from your Employee Health Department.

For more information about medical conditions that may warrant exemptions, please visit the CDC's website:

- Influenza vaccine: cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccinations.htm
- COVID-19 vaccine: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/your-vaccination.html

If a member of my staff has an approved exemption, will they be required to mask at work or have routine testing?

If an employee is approved for an exemption from the vaccination requirement, Employee Health will inform the employee of all required safety and health measures that the employee must use while remaining unvaccinated. It is expected that all employees with approved exemptions will be required to mask in all work settings until further notice.

What happens if a member of my staff chooses not to obtain one or both of the required vaccines and they do not have a qualifying exemption?

Ultimately, staff who do not meet the vaccination requirement and do not have an approved exemption will be placed on leave and could be deemed to have voluntarily resigned their employment if they are unwilling to come into compliance with BILH policy.

Will BILH require staff to wear stickers in order to know who is and isn't vaccinated?

At this time there are no plans to use stickers to indicate vaccination status.

Members of my staff are more comfortable speaking a language other than English. Where can they find information in their own language?

A transcript of the video message from BILH President and CEO Kevin Tabb, MD, is available in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Haitian Creole and Cape Verdean Creole. Additional materials including Questions and Answers and a flyer are available these languages.

Can an individual receive both a COVID-19 and flu vaccine at the same time?

Yes, according to the CDC, it is safe and effective to obtain both COVID-19 and flu vaccines at the same time. For more information, visit theCDC's website at cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/hcp/faq.html.

Are other employers mandating vaccines?

A number of health care organizations, universities, and other institutions have either already mandated vaccination or communicated their intent to require vaccination.

COVID-19 Vaccination

Where can my staff go to find more information about COVID-19 vaccines?

If your staff have questions about COVID-19 vaccines, please visit the vaccine Q&A page on the BILH COVID-19 Staff website at covid-19.bilh.org/vaccine/qa or on the CDC's website at cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines.

Where can staff obtain a COVID-19 vaccination?

Vaccines are available through Employee Health teams. Staff members can contact their local Employee Health department or BILH Employee Health at employeehealth@BILH.org or 617-278-8897 with questions and for assistance with obtaining a vaccination. COVID-19 vaccines are currently available at many primary care practices and at many commercial pharmacies, often on a walk-in basis. Staff can find a list of vaccination sites in their community at vaxfinder.mass.gov.

What if a staff member does not complete their second COVID-19 dose by October 31?

Staff who are not fully vaccinated by October 31 will be placed on leave. Physicians and clinicians credentialed at BILH facilities are also subject to compliance with this policy.

Will BILH require booster COVID-19 vaccines for those who are already fully vaccinated?

As of now, boosters are not required for BILH staff, although boosters will be available from Employee Health once approved by federal and state agencies.

What are some things to consider when talking to my staff who may be hesitant to get the vaccine?

Listen to your staff's perspectives with an open mind and without judgment. Encourage them to learn more about the vaccine and to talk to someone whom they respect and feel comfortable with. You can refer them to the BILH COVID-19 Staff website at covid-19.bilh.org/vaccine/qa and their doctor.

How will I know if my staff have been vaccinated?

Your Employee Health team will share information related to compliance. Please reach out to them directly if you have not received this information.

What is my role in protecting my staff's privacy related to their vaccination status?

An individual staff member's vaccination status should be kept confidential. Do not share individual vaccine status with other staff members, including during staff meetings or posting in public places.

What if I or a member of my staff has already contracted COVID-19? Do they need to get vaccinated?

COVID-19 antibodies protect people after they have been infected, but the protection is far less robust than the protection from the vaccines that have been developed. People who had COVID-19 can and should receive a COVID-19 vaccine, because it will give them additional levels of immunity. Staff members who have already had COVID-19 will still be required to be vaccinated. (Please note: People who have active COVID-19 infection should not be vaccinated until cleared by Employee Health.)

Will staff be paid if they have side effects after a COVID-19 vaccine that require them to take time away from work?

Yes, BILH has a COVID-19 pay practice that compensates staff if they are out of work due to side effects from a COVID-19 vaccine. Consistent with Massachusetts' COVID-19 Temporary Emergency Paid Sick Leave Program, BILH provides additional paid time off for those who miss work due to several different COVID-19 scenarios.

Flu Vaccination

Where can staff obtain a flu vaccine?

BILH hospitals and business units will conduct onsite flu vaccine clinics this fall. You will receive a schedule and more information from your local Employee Health group early this fall.

Will the flu vaccine be an annual requirement?

Yes. A new flu vaccine is required each year, because the most common strains of flu circulating may change each season. Flu vaccination is most often given between September and December to provide protection for the entire flu season. Therefore, for example, if you were vaccinated in January 2021, you will need to be vaccinated again for this upcoming flu season.

Why is BILH requiring flu shots for all staff, even if I do not come into contact with patients?

As with all quality and safety measures, BILH continually aims to provide the highest level of protection for our patients, staff and community. Similar to many other health care institutions, we believe one key way to do this is making sure our vaccination rate among staff is as high as possible.

Members of my staff are accustomed to masking during flu season in lieu of getting a flu vaccine. Can they still do that?

In previous years, a flu vaccine was encouraged but not required as a condition of employment. However, flu vaccines have a long safety record and have been permanently approved by the FDA for many years. Mandatory flu vaccines for all staff have been common practice in many other Massachusetts health care systems for some time now. BILH is aligning with these practices, and you will now be required to obtain a vaccine rather than choosing to mask instead of getting a vaccine.

Does the seasonal flu vaccine work? Can people still get sick after being vaccinated?

Influenza viruses circulate in the U.S. every year, mostly in late fall to early spring (roughly October to May), and usually peak between December and February. During the flu season, other viruses are also present and can cause flu-like illnesses, so some people who are vaccinated against influenza viruses may still became sick with other viruses. Recent studies show that vaccination can reduce the risk of flu illness by about 60% among the overall population when it is well-matched to the season's predominant strain(s). When the flu vaccine strain is only a partial match, those who get the flu after vaccination generally have less serious symptoms and recover more quickly. It may take up to two weeks for the vaccine to build up antibodies that protect you from the flu. If you get sick with the flu or a flu-like illness soon after getting your shot, it most likely means that you were already exposed to influenza or another virus before you received your shot.