



For Long-Term Care Facility Leaders

The Long-Term Care Leader's Guide to the Covid-19 Vaccine

How to prepare your staff and residents for the vaccine
mandate at long-term care facilities.

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Understanding the long-term care leader's role in helping staff and patients get vaccinated

In late January 2021, Advisory Board initially published this guide for long-term care facility leaders to navigate hesitancy as the vaccine began its rollout to patients and personnel. At the time, the United States was amid its third—and most deadly—wave of Covid-19 yet. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine had not been approved for emergency use, and the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were only beginning to be offered to long-term care facilities.

Over half a year later there have been numerous positive changes. 81% of the population, 65 years or older have been fully vaccinated, with 52% of the overall population vaccinated as well. Booster shots are under consideration. And most importantly, the Pfizer vaccine has been fully approved by the FDA.

However, Covid-19 has not been eradicated and we now stand at one of the most pivotal points in the pandemic. America is now amid a fourth wave of Covid-19, fueled by the highly contagious Delta variant, and vaccination rates have slowed across the country. Individuals who remain unvaccinated are largely no longer hesitant— they have made an active choice to avoid getting vaccinated.

Now, the Biden Administration has mandated that all health care personnel, including long-term care staff, get vaccinated or respective facilities will risk losing Medicaid and Medicare funding. Nationwide, many staff are still unsure of the vaccine and are hesitant to take it, but their options have changed. Leaders must now redouble their efforts to educate and persuade staff to get vaccinated to protect residents and staff, but also to protect the organization's funding.

Use this guide to help you address staff members' concerns, incentivize and assist staff to get vaccinated, and tactics to handle conversations ahead of the mandate deadline.

FAQs about the Covid-19 vaccine

Why are long-term care staff being mandated to get vaccinated?

CMS Administrator, Chiquita Brooks-LaSure, announced that mandatory vaccination in nursing homes has been put in place to ensure the safety of nursing home residents and staff. Data indicates a correlation between higher levels of staff vaccinations being linked to fewer outbreaks among residents—and only 62% of long-term care staff are currently vaccinated. Following this mandate, the Biden Administration has announced that all health care facilities funded by Medicare or Medicaid must vaccinate their employees or risk losing funding through the program. This was done to reduce competition between providers by singling out nursing homes alone and to further protect against the ongoing spread of the Delta variant.

Are there exceptions to the staff vaccination mandate?

Yes. The law offers exemptions for medical and religious reasons. Work closely with your legal counsel in cases that request exemption.

What will happen if my facility is not fully vaccinated?

CMS has announced that they will take a step-wise approach to enforce the vaccine mandate at long-term care facilities. CMS will begin with a notification that the facility is not in compliance with the regulation, followed by assessed civil monetary penalties, then denied payment, and ultimately removal from the funding program if the facility is still not in compliance. The mandate is expected to take effect in September.

Is the vaccine safe?

Yes. The FDA authorized the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines' use in the United States for emergency use, citing no serious safety concerns. The FDA has fully approved the Pfizer vaccine for individuals 16 years or older and is still authorized for emergency use for individuals aged 12 to 15. The most common side effects reported were pain at the injection site—no different than the average shot—and symptoms like fever and chills. Individuals that have had severe allergic reactions to vaccines in the past should consult with their doctor before being vaccinated. However, the CDC recommends anyone with allergies not related to vaccines or injectable medications (such as allergies to food, pets, environmental allergens, etc.) still receive the vaccine.

Is the vaccine safe for individuals with underlying medical conditions?

Yes. The vaccine is especially important for those with underlying medical conditions like heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, and obesity. Individuals with these conditions are more likely to get very sick from the Covid-19 disease and need the protection provided by the vaccine.

Source: "Importance of COVID-19 Vaccination for Residents of Long-term Care Facilities," CDC, Jul 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/LTCF-residents.html>; "Answering Your Questions About the New COVID-19 Vaccines," CDC, Aug 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/downloads/hcp-employees-general-faqs.pdf>; "Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19 Vaccination in Long-Term Care Facilities," CDC, Aug 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/toolkits/long-term-care/faqs.html>; "FDA Approves First COVID-19 Vaccine," FDA, Aug 2021, <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-approves-first-covid-19-vaccine>; "CMS will not immediately remove nursing homes from Medicare and Medicaid over vaccine requirement," *Modern Healthcare*, Aug 2021, <https://www.modernhealthcare.com/post-acute-care/cms-will-not-immediately-remove-nursing-homes-medicare-and-medicicaid-over-vaccine>; "COVID-19 Nursing Home Data," CMS, Aug 2021, <https://data.cms.gov/covid-19/covid-19-nursing-home-data>; "Path out of the Pandemic: PRESIDENT BIDEN'S COVID-19 ACTION PLAN," *White House*, Aug 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/covidplan/>

FAQs about the Covid-19 vaccine (continued)

Should residents and staff that have previously had Covid-19 get vaccinated?

Yes. The vaccine should be offered to all staff, including anyone who has previously tested positive for Covid-19. Due to the risk of severe illness from the virus and experts not knowing how long someone is protected from the virus after initial infection, nor whether immunity from prior infection can protect against multiple strains of the virus, the CDC recommends vaccination after recovery.

Should residents and staff that are currently showing symptoms or are currently infected get vaccinated?

No. Any individual showing symptoms or currently testing positive for Covid-19 should not get the vaccine at that time and should wait until fully recovered and at least 10 days from the onset of illness to get vaccinated. If an individual was treated for Covid-19 with monoclonal antibodies or convalescent plasma, the CDC recommends they should wait 90 days before getting vaccinated.

Where can long-term care staff get the Covid-19 vaccine?

Long-term care facility staff members who did not receive a vaccine during the clinics provided through the Pharmacy Partnership for Long-Term Care Program can speak to facility administrators to determine if a vaccine can be made available on site. If a vaccine is not available on site, staff members can visit [Vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) to assist in finding a vaccination provider nearest to them. Vaccines are widely available at retail pharmacies, county health departments, and primary care offices.

Why is it important to educate long-term care staff about the vaccine?

Receiving a vaccine is an important step in protecting facility staff and residents. Staff work on the frontline and are at risk of being exposed to Covid-19 every day on the job—they are essential in fighting the pandemic and sustaining capacity. Nationwide, there is a level of skepticism among staff to inoculation; educating them regarding the safety standards and diverse demographics of clinical participants will be integral to the goal of reducing spread of the virus and protecting staff and residents.

What is the best way to educate my staff?

We have created an FAQ for long-term care staff, which can be found [here](#). For additional information, you can view the CDC's Covid-19 Vaccination Communication Toolkit [here](#).

Who is administering vaccine booster shots?

The Biden Administration does not plan to rely on national pharmacy chains to give booster shots as it did in early 2021. Most nursing homes have indicated that they will be relying on their existing [long-term care pharmacies](#) to provide booster shots for residents eight months after their initial vaccination—which are expected to be authorized by federal health care officials in September. As an alternative, and an option for the less than 5% of nursing homes nationally who have indicated they do not have an existing long-term care pharmacy partner, residents can get their booster shots as part of regular shopping outings that facilities arrange to retail locations such as Walmart.

Source: "Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19 Vaccination in Long-Term Care Facilities," CDC, Aug 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/toolkits/long-term-care/faqs.html>; "Preparing Staff for COVID-19 Vaccination," CDC, Aug 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/toolkits/long-term-care/prepare-staff.html>; "Preparing Residents for COVID-19 Vaccination," CDC, Aug 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/toolkits/long-term-care/prepare-residents.html>; "Covid-19 Vaccines for Healthcare Personnel," CDC, May 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/hcp.html>; "Most nursing homes won't use pharmacy chains to administer coronavirus booster shots," *Washington Post*, Aug 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/08/27/nursing-homes-booster-shot-plans/>; "When to Get the Vaccine After Having COVID-19," *Health Matters*, 2021, <https://healthmatters.nyp.org/when-to-get-the-vaccine-after-having-covid-19/>

FAQs about the Covid-19 vaccine (continued)

Why is it important to educate my residents regarding the vaccine?

Ensuring residents are vaccinated as soon as possible will help save their lives and the lives of those around them that are at high risk to dying of Covid-19. Due to age, prevalence of underlying medical conditions, and communal setting of long-term care facilities, the CDC recommends immediate inoculation of residents.

What should I know about resident consent for the vaccine?

It is up to the resident (or person appointed to make medical decisions on their behalf) to consent to receive the Covid-19 vaccine, which must be documented in their charts. Residents (or medical proxies) will also obtain the EUA (Emergency Use Authorization) fact sheet prior to inoculation for the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines, which explains risks and benefits. The federal government does not specifically require written, emailed, or verbal consent.

Does staff still need to wear PPE after vaccination?

Yes. Most Covid-19 vaccines will require two shots for inoculation to work, with a period of 21 or 28 days (depending on which vaccine is administered) between shots. Additionally, because it is unclear whether vaccinated people can still pass on the virus, staff still need to protect others around them by wearing PPE and following social distancing guidelines until those recommendation is changed by the CDC.

Does staff still need to be tested for Covid-19 after receiving the vaccine?

Yes. Facilities should continue their current testing protocols until the CDC changes its Covid-19 testing guidelines for long-term care facility staff.

Incentivize and assist staff in getting vaccinated

Now that the Covid-19 vaccine has been mandated for all healthcare personnel, including long-term care facility staff, it will fall on the long-term care leaders to help staff get vaccinated. You will need to provide motivation and guidance to ensure that your staff meet the mandate and remain in their current role. Below we have provided best practices to assist you with this effort.

Incentives to encourage vaccination

- ▶ Incentivize staff to get vaccinated by offering a few days of paid time off or by providing prize giveaways for vaccinated staff.
- ▶ Address logistical barriers by offering administration to schedule staff members' vaccine appointment for them and grant paid time to receive the vaccine. Offer transport vouchers for Lyft or Uber and Care.com credits for childcare.
- ▶ Encourage staff to get vaccinated as a team by promising each vaccinated worker a cash bonus. Each worker receives a part of that bonus after their first shot and the remaining amount when at least 75% of staff members are vaccinated.

Guidance on conversations with staff

- ▶ Conduct one on one conversations with hesitant staff members and have medical experts on hand to answer any questions they may have. Listen to the objections of staff members and provide fact-based evidence addressing those concerns.
- ▶ Educate staff members on the hard facts of the Covid-19 vaccine; in simple terms, describe what the mRNA vaccine is and how it works. Emphasize that, while this vaccine was introduced to them quickly, mandatory inoculations are not something new to the workplace (e.g., requiring a flu shot).
- ▶ Due to the demographics of nursing home staff being predominantly younger women, address all concerns regarding worries over the vaccine affecting fertility. There is currently no evidence showing any of the vaccines cause fertility problems in women or men.
- ▶ Remember that this is a very difficult decision for hesitant staff to make. The goal of these conversations is to be empathetic and ensure your staff remain in their roles.

Project director

Blake Zissman, Analyst

ZissmanB@advisory.com

202-568-7873

Program leadership

Monica Westhead, Managing Director

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655 New York Avenue NW, Washington DC 20001
202-266-5600 | [advisory.com](https://www.advisory.com)