Large U.S. Hospitals Drop COVID Vaccine Mandates for Healthcare Workers Amid Labor Shortages

Some of the nation's largest hospital systems have dropped COVID vaccine mandates for staff after a federal judge [issued an injunction](#) against the Biden Administration's vaccine requirements for health care workers.

According to the [Wall Street Journal](#), hospital operators including HCA Healthcare Inc., Tenet Healthcare Corp. and hospital systems AdventHealth, Intermountain Healthcare and the Cleveland Clinic dropped the mandate.

Hospitalized have struggled to retain enough nurses, technicians and janitors to handle hospitalizations in recent months as labor costs in the industry have soared. Even before the pandemic, hospitals struggled to find nurses as burnout among healthcare workers hit an all-time high.

Currently, thousands of nurses have left or lost their jobs over their refusal to receive COVID vaccines. As of mid-September, 30% of workers at more than 2,000 U.S. hospitals remained unvaccinated, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

"It's been a mass exodus, and a lot of people in the healthcare industry are willing to go and shop around," [said](#) Wade Symons, lawyer and head of consulting firm Mercer's U.S. regulatory practice. "If you get certain healthcare facilities that don't require it, those could be a magnet for those people who don't want the vaccine. They'll probably have an easier time attracting labor."

A federal judge on Nov. 30 [ruled](#) the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services didn't have the authority to mandate vaccines for healthcare workers, blocking a Biden administration rule that affected some 10 million workers. The mandate had required all workers at facilities that participate in Medicare and Medicaid to get second shots by Jan. 4.

"I don't think the mandates were helpful and I think the court in Louisiana did everyone a service," said Alan Levine, CEO of Ballad Health, which runs 21 hospitals in Tennessee and Virginia.

Mr. Levine [said](#) his company has about 14,000 employees. About 2,000 are unvaccinated or didn't request an exemption to the requirement. "That many people having to be terminated would have been devastating to our system," Levine said.

The Cleveland Clinic, which has about 65,000 employees, and Intermountain Healthcare have both [suspended vaccine requirements](#). Cleveland Clinic said it would add safety measures, such as periodic testing for unvaccinated employees.

According to [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), the healthcare sector has lost nearly half a million workers since Feb. 2020.

Some hospitals are continuing forward with COVID vaccine mandates regardless. Kaiser Permanente, which runs 39 hospitals and employs 210,000 people gave its employees until Dec. 1 to get vaccinated — 352 employees were fired last week for failing to do so and another 1,500 face termination in early January.

Northwell Health, New York, employs 77,000 people and fired 1,400 employees in October for refusing to get vaccinated. A spokesperson for the healthcare system said they will not hire anyone who has not been vaccinated.