

# COVID-19

A message from Ballad Health Corporate  
Emergency Operations Center (CEOC)



**TO:** Ballad Health All  
**FROM:** Ballad Health Corporate Emergency Operations Center  
**DATE:** Jan. 18, 2022  
**TITLE:** COVID-19 Vaccine Update briefing  
**ACTION:** Please post and cascade to all team members.

Last Thursday, the Supreme Court of the United States, after hearing oral arguments, refused to permit an injunction against the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) COVID-19 vaccination mandate. Therefore, CMS is permitted to implement and enforce their new Medicare Conditions of Participation for healthcare facilities, which requires each healthcare facility to ensure their employees receive the COVID-19 vaccine within a prescribed period of time. This means Ballad Health, in order to remain eligible for Medicare and Medicaid participation, must comply with the rule and ensure our team members are vaccinated unless they have an approved medical or religious exemption.

This is the same requirement Ballad Health implemented in November but suspended in early December while the mandate was reviewed by the Supreme Court. Now that the high court's decision has been made, Ballad Health must comply with the ruling.

More than 70% of our health system's patients are covered by Medicare, Medicaid and other federal programs that pay for care for low-income populations. If we fail to comply with this federal mandate, our hospitals will likely receive substantial fines, and ultimately, termination from Medicare and Medicaid programs. This would be devastating to our region, as our hospitals would not be able to continue providing the care our communities rely on and deserve.

As you may be aware, Ballad Health sent a letter on Jan. 3 to CMS, outlining concerns for a federally imposed mandate for healthcare workers. We included recommendations to CMS to allow waivers for healthcare organizations in cases where the mandate would potentially cause more harm than good. These recommendations included allowing hospitals in areas where there is a shortage of healthcare professionals to seek waivers from the mandate if they can demonstrate difficulties with retention of staff. We continue to hope CMS will consider our recommendations as they enforce the mandate.

While we have made our opinions heard on this matter and to date resisted a mandate of our own, we are at a point where we must implement our policy.

Please find a list of Frequently Asked Questions for team members to review. If after reading these you have additional questions, please contact the Ballad Health Corporate Emergency Operations Center at [BalladHealthCorporateEOC@balladhealth.org](mailto:BalladHealthCorporateEOC@balladhealth.org).

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## Frequently Asked Questions

### Vaccination

**Q. If I choose to get vaccinated, what is the deadline for meeting the vaccine requirement?**

- A. To meet the requirement, all eligible team members must have received the necessary doses to be fully vaccinated by Friday, March 11, 2022.

Based on this timeline, team members who choose to receive the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine **must receive their first dose by Friday, Feb. 11, at the latest**. The single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine is also an option, and this must also be received by Friday, Feb. 11.

**Q. Are Ballad Health PODs offering team member vaccinations?**

- A. Due to existing strains on our staff, Vaccination PODs (point of dispensing) will not reopen for vaccination. However, we have decided to keep our Community Vaccination Center (CVC) open through March 10 should team members choose to get vaccinated at that location. The CVC is in The Mall at Johnson City at the former Goody's entrance near Forever 21. The center is open each week on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Team members can also choose to get vaccinated at other community vaccination sites such as CVS, Walgreens, Food City, Sam's Club, the health department or possibly their primary care provider office.

**Q. If I've been vaccinated, how do I provide proof of vaccination?**

- A. If you have already provided Team Member Health with proof of vaccination or if you have received your COVID-19 vaccination from a Ballad Health vaccine POD, community vaccination center or a Ballad Health Medical Associates clinic, we already have your record of immunization on file in Epic. No action is required on your part.

If you were vaccinated outside the health system and have not provided Team Member Health with proof of vaccination, you will need to do so. You will be required to bring, **in person**, to Team Member Health a printed copy of your COVID-19 immunization record that includes the vaccine brand, lot number and the date and facility where you were vaccinated, by Friday, Feb. 11.

**Q. If I recently tested positive for COVID-19, will I receive a deferral for vaccination?**

- A. Team members who test positive for COVID-19 or receive a monoclonal antibody treatment (MAB) within 90 days of the first-dose vaccination deadline (Feb. 11) are eligible for deferral for vaccination. The 90-day deferral begins on the date you test positive or receive your MAB treatment. After your 90-day period ends, you have seven days to get your first of a two-dose series vaccine or a vaccine that only requires one dose and the second dose 28 days later.

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For example, if you tested positive on Jan. 5, the deadline for your first of a two-dose series or a single-dose vaccine is April 12. You must receive your first dose within seven (7) days of your deferral end date to remain compliant; your second dose would then be 28 days later.

**Q. If I receive an approved 90-day deferral for vaccination, but still plan to request an exemption, what is my deadline?**

A. If you plan to submit a request for a medical or religious exemption, you still need to submit your request by 5 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 31.

**Q. If I opt out of vaccination, will my employment with Ballad Health be recorded as a termination or resignation?**

A. Under our COVID-19 vaccination policy, all team members will be required to be vaccinated by the deadline unless they have an approved deferral, medical or religious exemption.

This means if you choose to opt out of vaccination and do not comply with the federal mandate or our policy, your employment status will be moved to inactive for 90 days unless you notify your manager or Human Resources of your wish to be considered as a voluntary resignation or a termination.

**With a voluntarily resignation, you will still be eligible for rehire when you meet compliance requirements. Otherwise, your employee status will be listed as involuntarily termination pursuant to our Ballad Health policy, and not eligible for rehire.**

## Exemptions

**Q. What is the process for submitting a medical or religious exemption request?**

If you filed for an exemption last November, you will receive an email today (Tuesday) or tomorrow indicating that your exemption request was approved or denied. If approved, your letter means that you are coded in our system as having an approved exemption on file and you do not have to do anything else.

If you receive an email indicating that your request was denied, you may reapply and follow the process described below in bold.

If you think you applied in November but did not receive an email and your information was not received or processed, reapply and follow the process described below in bold.

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New exemption requests can be made beginning Tuesday, Jan. 18, by [clicking the link to the web form](#) on the Human Resources department page of the Ballad Health Intranet and following the directions on the form. **NOTE:** You must be on a Ballad Health network device to access the intranet.

**Submissions for all requests must be received by 5 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 31. Religious exemption requests require BOTH forms, while medical exemptions must provide the required physician documentation by either attaching the document to the exemption application form or by scanned email to [teammemberhealth@balladhealth.org](mailto:teammemberhealth@balladhealth.org) by 5 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 31.**

**Q. How will I know if my exemption request is approved?**

A. We will review exemption requests and begin communicating decisions as early as possible. Our goal is to have all requests for medical or religious reasons reviewed and communicated to each team member by Friday, Feb. 4. Team members who are granted an authorized exemption will be required to follow all respiratory protection guidelines and policies.

Leadership will be provided updated lists of team members who are currently not meeting the required mandate, those with a deferral or those with an approved exemption (not the reason why it was given). Planning for appropriate patient care coverage and departmental operations in advance of anticipated deadlines will be of utmost importance.

**Q. If I previously submitted a request for a religious exemption, do I need to resubmit my request?**

A. No. If you submitted a request for a religious exemption, **and it was approved** (as evidenced by receipt of the email or by checking with your leader to confirm on the report), you do not need to resubmit your request. If you think you submitted a request before the vaccine mandate was placed on hold and have not received notification of approval or denial, you will need to reapply.

**Q. If I previously submitted a request for a medical exemption, do I need to resubmit my request?**

A. If you submitted a request for a medical exemption **and it was approved** (as evidenced by receipt of the email or by checking with your leader to confirm on the report), you do not need to resubmit your request. If you think you submitted a request before the vaccine mandate was placed on hold and have not received notification of approval or denial, you will need to reapply.

**Q. Will team members out on an approved leave (FMLA) receive notification of their exemption request?**

A. Team members who are out on an approved leave of absence will receive a separate communication from their leave coordinator with direction on how to submit an exemption request or any requirements needed to comply with the mandate and will have seven (7) days from their return-to-work date to receive the vaccine and provide documentation to remain compliant.

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Vaccination is an important decision, and we want you to take the time you need to ask questions, research the science and discuss vaccination with your physician and family. If have questions, you can email our Corporate Emergency Operations Center (CEOC) at [CEOC-Vaccines@balladhealth.org](mailto:CEOC-Vaccines@balladhealth.org) and a member of the clinical executive team will ensure you have credible information to help you make an informed decision. Should you choose to become vaccinated at a later time, we hope you will consider returning to Ballad Health and caring for our patients and communities.