



Pfizer's full approval triggers new vaccine mandates

BY KARL EVERS-HILLSTROM - 08/23/21 03:34 PM EDT

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The full federal approval of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine on Monday immediately, as expected, led to new vaccination mandates by government entities, a development that suggests more could be coming.

Immediately after the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) gave full approval to the vaccine Monday, New York City announced that all public school teachers and staff will be required to get the shot. The Pentagon later confirmed that it would move forward with a vaccine mandate for military service members.

Biden administration officials believe that the private sector will follow suit.

“For businesses and universities that have been thinking about putting vaccine requirements in place in order to create safer spaces for people to work and learn, I think that this move from the FDA, when it comes, will actually help them to move forward with those kinds of plans,” Surgeon General Vivek Murthy told CNN on Sunday, prior to the FDA announcement.

A few dozen corporations, including Microsoft, Tyson Foods, Walt Disney and Netflix, announced vaccine requirements after the Biden administration mandated vaccinations for federal employees late last month.

More companies will implement their own vaccine requirements following the FDA decision, said Michelle Strowhiro, a lawyer at McDermott Will & Emery who advises businesses on COVID-19 employment issues.

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"Many employers, even though they could've implemented a vaccine mandate pre-FDA approval, have been waiting for full FDA approval because they believe their employees will be more receptive to a vaccine mandate," she said.

Employers could already legally enforce vaccine requirements, but some have privately fretted about losing employees who were not willing to get vaccinated.

FDA approval could sway some workers who have been hesitant thus far. A June poll from the Kaiser Family Foundation found that 31 percent of unvaccinated people would be more likely to get the COVID-19 vaccine upon full approval.

"What employers are trying to balance right now is implementing the right safety standards for their workforce while also being cognizant of the fact that the labor market is so difficult and many employers are already struggling with having the right number of people on staff," Strowhiro said.

Vaccine mandates that have already been announced provide religious and medical exemptions required under federal employment rules. Some mandates allow workers to undergo frequent COVID-19 testing instead of getting the job.

Chevron became the first major oil and gas company to require vaccinations for some of its employees Monday, The Wall Street Journal reported. The company is reportedly weighing a mandate for all of its employees amid rising infections.

The FDA's approval is accelerating vaccinations in some workplaces that have already implemented their own mandates.

Earlier this month, United Airlines announced it would require all 67,000 of its U.S. employees to get vaccinated within five weeks of FDA approval or Oct. 25, whichever comes first. A United Airlines spokesperson confirmed Monday that all eligible workers must get vaccinated by Sept. 27 or risk getting fired.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce announced last week that it would mandate vaccines for all employees, including virtual workers, following FDA approval.

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Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases [Anthony Fauci](#) told reporters earlier this month that full FDA approval would bring "a flood" of vaccine mandates to businesses and schools.

The FDA decision has already emboldened multiple states to implement vaccine mandates for public school employees. New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy (D) announced Monday that all state employees, including

educators, would be required to get vaccinated by Oct. 18 or undergo regular testing.

Local school districts will also have more freedom to require their workers to get vaccinated.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton (R) withdrew a lawsuit against San Antonio's school district over its vaccine mandate Monday, KSAT News reported. Paxton had argued that the district's policy violated an executive order prohibiting governmental entities from mandating vaccines that were only approved for emergency use.

The National Education Association, the nation's largest teachers union, endorsed vaccine requirements for educators earlier this month. The American Federation of Teachers said it would look to negotiate vaccine mandates with employers.

Roughly 6 in 10 Americans support vaccination requirements for teachers, according to an Associated Press poll released Monday.

Democratic gubernatorial nominee and former Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe called on every Virginia employer to require vaccinations shortly after the FDA announcement. He previously called on all of the states' schools to require the shot for their staff.

Overnight Health Care: FDA grants full approval to Pfizer's COVID-19... FDA grants full approval to Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine

The urgency comes as students return to in-person classes while the delta variant continues to spread rapidly across parts of the U.S. with low vaccination rates.

School districts in Texas, Georgia and Florida were recently forced to shut down amid COVID-19 outbreaks. Full FDA approval still doesn't apply to individuals under age 16, and the FDA's emergency use authorization only covers those age 12 and older.

More than 204 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine have already been administered in the U.S. under the emergency use authorization, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But more than a quarter of U.S. adults have still not received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

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