

# BUSINESS CALLED ON TO HELP END THE PANDEMIC:

## Companies and others must prepare for new mandates

### OVERVIEW

President Biden has announced a series of new measures to help bring an end to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a combination of Executive Orders and administrative rules, Federal employees, employers with more than 100 employees, and many healthcare workers – up to 100 million workers in all – will be required to get vaccinated against COVID-19. More specifically:

- + The President has directed the Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to draft rules requiring employers with 100 or more employees to ensure their workforce is fully vaccinated or that any unvaccinated workers produce a negative test result on at least a weekly basis before coming to work.
- + The President has issued an Executive Order requiring all federal executive branch workers and contractors to be vaccinated.
- + The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) will draft rules requiring all healthcare workers in facilities that receive Medicaid and Medicare funding to be vaccinated.
- + The President has also called on entertainment venues like sports arenas, concert halls, and other venues where large groups of people gather to require their patrons be vaccinated or show a negative test for entry.

The President's COVID Action Plan can be found [here](#).

Many of these actions are almost certain to be challenged in court, but whether they are ultimately deemed legal, most agree that executive leadership should embrace the concept of universal vaccination or repeated negative testing as necessary to ensure the safety and wellness of their workforce, clients and customers. With unvaccinated people accounting for 95% of deaths, vaccination is essential and public health experts agree that these policies make sense for businesses, employees, customers, workplaces, and society.

The new rules and Executive Orders will require businesses to develop both operational and communications plans to let employees and others know what is expected of them in the weeks ahead.

### LATEST WEBER SHANDWICK SURVEY RESULTS

In Weber Shandwick's latest national public pulse survey<sup>1</sup>, conducted before the President's mandates were announced, Americans expressed a growing frustration and a decline in confidence in both government's handling of the pandemic and the overall direction of the country. But there continues to be growing support for companies to enact mandates that ensure a safe workplace for employees. Highlights from the survey include:

- + **Bipartisan support for employer mandates.** There is bipartisan support for employer vaccine mandates or tests that ensure safe workplaces – 78% of Democrats; 57% of Republicans and 48% of Independents.
- + **Strong support for employer measures to control the spread.** 66% of workers said their employer has the right to ask onsite workers to mandate that employees be vaccinated, or show a negative COVID test, and 75% said their employer can require masks to be worn on the job in the workplace. About two-thirds of respondents said they agree with their company's vaccine policy.
- + **Belief that the unvaccinated are causing spread.** Nearly 80% of the vaccinated population – and even a quarter of the unvaccinated – say the main reason COVID-19 is spreading is because not enough people are getting vaccinated.
- + **The vaccinated feel more confident.** Vaccinated individuals are more confident in the country's direction than unvaccinated persons – by a significant margin of 63% to 43%.

**EXPECTATIONS FOR BUSINESS REMAIN HIGH.**

**73%** say their **employer is taking the right actions**. This has stayed consistent since the spring of 2020. 67% of workers say their own employer has put their safety and well-being ahead of profits, while 74% said their employer is communicating effectively about COVID-19.

**59%** of employees said it is **very important for business to help end the pandemic** up from 47% who said this in May.

**83%** of employees said they want their employer to make **mental health and wellness a priority**, create a civil work environment for all employees (83%), and promote zero tolerance for discrimination and harassment (78%).

**GUIDELINES FOR COMPANIES**

- + **First and foremost, embrace the new federal mandates designed to ensure workplaces are safe.** Companies should prepare now to implement the new rules, but more importantly, own this decision and communicate it as your responsibility to ensure a safe workplace for all employees, not just as compliance with a federal mandate.
- + **Regularly communicate to employees what is expected of them.** Set and communicate a timeline for implementation. Talk with employees who disagree with the new policy or express concerns about how it is being implemented in their own company.
- + **Address worker stress and mental health.** Both now and when employees return to the workplace, watch for signs of stress, fatigue, burnout, frustration or other emotions that can impact culture and productivity. Just as employees had to adapt to working remotely at the beginning of the pandemic, they will again face disruptions in their personal life when they return to the workplace.
- + **Acknowledge potential employee concerns around vaccine mandates.** Talk with employees about the kind of proof the company will require of workers, how it will manage and protect that information, and address concerns that employees might have about their health privacy.

Beyond compliance with the new federal mandates, companies should also:

- + **Assess and update corporate policies.** Companies will also have to review and update policies around hosting large gatherings, attending trade shows or business conferences, holiday celebrations, and guidelines for employee travel. Prepare for these to quickly change as the virus improves or worsens.
- + **Share vaccine information regularly.** Companies should continue to provide essential vaccination information to their employees, and should counter misinformation.
- + **Monitor new health guidelines.** New CDC guidelines are expected this fall that may impact both employees and customers, such as updated travel guidelines, mask wearing, vaccine booster shots, contact tracing, and occupational safety and health guidance. State and local guidelines may be revised as well. This requires regular monitoring by legal and human resource personnel.
- + **Prepare for potential risks.** Companies should scenario plan for potential risks related to their actions and other developments in the workplace and the world at large, including employee pushback, the impact of misinformation, breakthrough cases causing outbreaks and the spread of new variants.
- + **Recognize impact globally.** While the OSHA rule will only apply to U.S.-based operations, companies that operate globally must continue to monitor how their workforces are impacted across all geographies where they do business, as different regulations are in force, and vaccine availability and delivery capacities varies across countries.
- + **Continue to survey the workforce.** Companies should survey their workforce to understand changing views about returning to the workplace, whether in full-time or a hybrid mode, and what their employees expect as they return to offices.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:**

**MICHO SPRING**  
Chair, Global Corporate Practice  
President, Weber Shandwick New England  
[mspring@webershandwick.com](mailto:mspring@webershandwick.com)

**PAM JENKINS**  
President, Global Public Affairs and  
Weber Shandwick South  
[pjenkins@webershandwick.com](mailto:pjenkins@webershandwick.com)

**KATE BULLINGER**  
President, United Minds  
[kate.bullinger@unitedmindsglobal.com](mailto:kate.bullinger@unitedmindsglobal.com)