



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on July 26, 2021

NFL Imposes Strict Policies Against Unvaccinated Players

The National Football League (NFL) made headlines last week when it released a memo threatening NFL teams with punishment if their unvaccinated players are believed to cause COVID-19 outbreaks, even as vaccinated individuals continue to contract the virus in [record numbers](#).

“The NFL just informed clubs that if a game cannot be rescheduled during the 18-week season in 2021 due to a COVID outbreak among unvaccinated players, the team with the outbreak will FORFEIT and be credited with a loss for playoff seeding, per sources,” Tom Pelissero of [NFL Network reported](#) when the shocking memo was released.



According to the memo, nearly all clubs have vaccinated 100 percent of their Tier 1 and 2 staffs, and more than 75 percent of players are in the process of being vaccinated, with more than half the clubs holding vaccination rates of more than 80 percent. The new policies implemented by the NFL for the 2021 season are clearly intended to punish those individuals who refuse the vaccines.

“Every club is obligated under the Constitution and Bylaws to have its team ready to play at the scheduled time and place,” the memo stated. “A failure to do so is deemed detrimental. There is no right to postpone a game. Postponements will only occur if required by government authorities, medical experts, or at the Commissioner’s discretion.”

As such, if a game is required to be postponed or canceled because of a COVID outbreak among unvaccinated individuals, the burden of the cancellation or delay falls to the offending club under the new policy. The team responsible for the canceled game will be held financially responsible for any losses incurred and be subjected to potential discipline from NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell. Likewise, if a game is cancelled and cannot be rescheduled within the 18-week schedule, neither teams’ players will receive their weekly salaries, according to the memo, a provision that is sure to cause friction amongst team members.

The NFL also announced protocol modifications for vaccinated individuals. Unvaccinated players will be subject to daily testing, required to wear masks at club facilities and during travel, required to physically distance themselves from others in club facilities and meal rooms, and quarantine after “high risk exposures” to COVID, none of which applies to vaccinated individuals. Likewise, unvaccinated players are subject to travel restrictions, capacity limits in weight rooms, restricted from saunas and steam rooms, prohibited from social media, marketing, and sponsorship activities, and prohibited from leaving their hotel room or interacting with anyone outside of the “Team Traveling Party” during team travel.

The NFL will only cover costs for testing of players up to \$400,000. All testing costs in excess of that amount will be the responsibility of the club, which means teams with large percentages of unvaccinated players will have increased financial burdens for the required daily tests of those players.



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Sports Illustrated's Jenny Vrentas observes the policies use "competitive disadvantage as an incentive to being vaccinated" and could negatively impact the employment status of players, particularly those with "less secure" spots on the team.

The new policies prompted public opposition from several NFL players, including popular players such as DeAndre Hopkins of the Arizona Cardinals, who had the [third-most receiving yards](#) of any player during the 2020 season, and Tampa Bay Buccaneers running back [Leonard Fournette](#), whose 448 yards from scrimmage was the most of any player on any team this postseason. Fournette tweeted last week, "Vaccine I can't do it."

"Never thought I would say this, But [sic] being put in a position to hurt my team because I don't want to partake in the vaccine is making me question my future in the Nfl," Hopkins wrote July 22 in a [since-deleted tweet](#).

[Antonio Hamilton](#), a newcomer on the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, called the vaccines "experiments" in a tweet and said, "If they get rid of me for sharing information to the misinformed, then so be it!"

Washington defensive lineman Montez Sweat has vocally opposed the vaccination in recent months.

"Obviously they want everybody to be vaccinated to move freely around the facility and with traveling," Sweat said, according to ESPN.com. "But everybody has their own beliefs and they're entitled to their own decision."

In addition to the vaccination policy, NFL policy also requires close monitoring of unvaccinated players to ensure they are adhering to COVID-19 protocols such as mask-wearing and social distancing. Every time a football player is caught breaking COVID-19 protocols, he will be fined \$14,650, *Sports Illustrated* reported.

Sports Illustrated noted the effects that these policies are sure to have on locker room climates:

The new policies announced Thursday further raise the stakes by increasing the potential competitive disadvantage for teams with a high percentage of unvaccinated players, as well as introducing possible financial penalties for both players and clubs, which would also lose money in event of a cancellation and would have to bear the costs for rescheduling due to an outbreak among its unvaccinated players. This introduces the possibility of locker rooms to become divided over an issue that offers little room for compromise.

But if NFL players thought they'd find an ally in their union, they were sadly mistaken, according to Life Site News. In a memo to its members, the National Football League Players Association said, "We remind you that the same basic rules applied last year. If games were missed because of a COVID-19 outbreak, nobody would have gotten paid." The difference this year, however, is the availability of COVID vaccines and the NFL's decision to "impose additional penalties on clubs responsible for the outbreak," the union remarked.

Edge rusher Matthew Judon, who signed with the New England Patriots this offseason, blasted the NFLPA in a tweet, saying the players union "[expletive] sucks," Boston.com reported.

Meanwhile, COVID [outbreaks amongst the vaccinated](#) continue to undermine policies like NFL's.

The New York Yankees' July 15 series opener against the Boston Red Sox, for example, was abruptly postponed after three fully vaccinated Yankees tested positive for the virus.



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Six fully vaccinated Democratic Texas lawmakers who traveled to Washington, D.C., to avoid a vote on priority voting bills during a special legislative session [tested positive](#) for COVID.

In Israel, considered the “[poster child](#)” of sorts for COVID vaccination, has seen a rise in cases, with most of the COVID-positive individuals having been [vaccinated](#).

As of July 12, the CDC reported more than 5,000 breakthrough COVID cases resulting in hospitalization or death, Life Site News [reported](#). There are many more breakthrough COVID cases that are not being record by the CDC because they have not resulted in hospitalization or death, Life Site News reported.

The 2021 NFL season is set to begin on Thursday, September 9, with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers hosting the Dallas Cowboys. Whether the NFL policies will change the roster for game day remains to be seen.



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