



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on June 24, 2021

America's Largest Healthcare Workers Union Opposes Hospitals' COVID-19 Vaccine Mandates

The president of the largest union of healthcare workers in the United States says the organization will fight against companies requiring mandatory COVID-19 vaccines for employees.

[Speaking](#) to the local outlet *The Gothamist*, George Gresham, president of 1199SEIU Funds, stated, "Whether there is a legal challenge that we can make, or whether it's just a pure organizational challenge that we can make, we are not going to just give in." The union is headquartered in New York City, but [represents](#) 400,000 healthcare workers throughout New York state as well as Massachusetts, New Jersey, Maryland, Florida, and Washington, D.C.



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Gresham mentioned that he got vaccinated and has encouraged all union members to do so, but expressed his belief the medical workers "have the right to make their decision about their own health."

"A hard-handed approach will not work and will only create greater frustration for the health care heroes who have been battling this pandemic every day for the last 15 months," Gresham added.

The New York State Nurses Association, which represents more than 42,000 nurses statewide, has also [taken a stand](#) against vaccine mandates for healthcare employees as a condition of employment, while supporting calls for voluntary COVID-19 vaccination for the public.

The association argues that the public has legitimate concerns regarding the vaccines' safety, efficacy, and effectiveness since the jabs have been developed and processed under an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA), and at "warp speed."

The union's opposition is based on the medical principle of "do no harm," as well as a belief people's autonomy over their own bodies, self-determination, and informed consent.

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The announcements came in response to NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital in New York's [decision](#) to mandate its 48,000 workers be vaccinated against COVID-19 by September 1, joining a [growing list](#) of healthcare networks across the country issuing similar mandates.

"We care for sick people — some critically so — every day, and we are responsible for their safety while in our care," the mandate notice [said](#). "The stakes in this matter are high, and the evidence is clear that getting vaccinated against COVID-19 is the most important and responsible action we can take as NYP team members for the safety and well-being of our patients and visitors, our communities, and ourselves," it added.

Workers at NewYork-Presbyterian have until August 1 to apply for an exemption for medical or religious



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reasons, or because of pregnancy. “Exemption requests will be carefully evaluated and accommodated, if appropriate. Those who are granted exemptions will be tested frequently for COVID-19,” the notice stated.

The mandate order comes as other hospital systems in New York are considering requiring workers to get vaccinated, [according](#) to Greater New York Hospital Association President Kenneth Raske.

“Every hospital and health care system is trying to achieve a 100% COVID-19 vaccination rate of their workers. The only question is how,” he said in a statement Friday supporting NewYork-Presbyterian’s mandate.

The [FDA guidance](#) on “Emergency Use Authorization of Medical Products and Related Authorities” explicitly states that people “have the option to accept or refuse the EUA product.” Until all three COVID-19 jabs get full approval, the informed consent of the recipient is necessary.

However, [according](#) to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), state and local mandates are subject to state and local laws.

Also, the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC), a federal government agency that protects workers from discrimination, issued a [guidance](#) on May 28, that, ironically, promotes discrimination against workers who refuse to get an experimental gene injection. The guidance allows employers to legally require COVID-19 shots to reenter a physical workplace as long as they follow requirements to find alternative arrangements for employees unable to get vaccinated for medical reasons or religious beliefs.

Also, in the first federal ruling on vaccine mandates, a Houston judge [dismissed](#) a lawsuit by hospital employees who declined the COVID-19 shot, offering the first legal precedent for the policy. The [ruling](#) states that the hospital’s requirement does not violate federal law or public policy.

More than 60 percent of companies in the U.S. will require proof of vaccination from their employees, according to a new business [survey](#) conducted by Arizona State University with support from the Rockefeller Foundation.

Overall, 44 percent will require all employees to get vaccinated, 31 percent will just encourage vaccinations, and 14 percent will require some employees to get vaccinated. When it comes to consequences for failing to comply with company vaccination policy, 42 percent of businesses said the employee will not be allowed to return to the physical work environment, and 35 percent said disciplinary actions are on the table, up to and including possible termination.



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