

For Employees

Frequently Asked Questions on Vaccinations and Exemptions

On September 9, 2021, President Biden issued [Executive Order 14043 on Requiring Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccination for Federal Employees](#), mandating all federal employees be fully vaccinated by November 22, 2021 (the Mandate).

The following provides guidance in response to employee questions regarding compliance with the Mandate, exemptions, and the processes for requesting exemptions based on disability, religion or limited temporary medical extensions to the November 22, 2021 deadline.

Q1. Is the COVID-19 vaccination mandatory for all civilian employees at DHS?

A: Yes, unless DHS approves an exemption from the Mandate based on a disability, a sincerely held religious practice, belief, or observance, or a limited temporary delay due to a documented medical necessity. The Mandate applies regardless of where you work, or if you are working onsite at a federal facility or remotely on maximum telework.

Q2. Am I still required to be vaccinated if I've already had COVID-19?

A: Yes. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the COVID-19 vaccination for individuals who have previously had COVID-19. As a result, previous COVID-19 infection does not satisfy the Mandate requirements but, depending upon CDC guidance, acute or recent illness with COVID-19 may be the basis for a request for a limited temporary medical extension.

Q3. What is my deadline for becoming fully vaccinated?

A: If you are not fully vaccinated or have only received a partial vaccination, you must become fully vaccinated by November 22, 2021. You are considered fully vaccinated for COVID-19 14 days after you have received the requisite number of doses of a COVID-19 vaccine approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or World Health Organization (WHO).

Q4. Are there any employee exemptions from the Mandate?

A: Executive Order 14043 provides that agencies must make exceptions as required by law. DHS is required to reasonably accommodate you if you are a qualified individual with a disability and unable to get vaccinated because of your disability, unless providing an accommodation would cause undue hardship to agency operations or would pose a safety risk to yourself or others. In addition, under some circumstances, DHS may also be required to provide an exemption to accommodate an employee's sincerely held religious beliefs, practices, or observances. Finally, DHS is required to consider a request for a delay based on a documented medical need that necessitates a delay in vaccination.

Q5. Is my manager or supervisor authorized to grant my request for an exemption to the Mandate?

A: No. Your manager or supervisor is not authorized to consider, grant or deny an exemption to the Mandate. Instead you should submit your request to the DHS Accessibility Compliance Management System (ACMS) to begin the process for requesting a medical or religious exemption to the Mandate.

Q6. What is the general process I must follow to request an exemption from the Mandate?

A: Generally, you should request an exemption from the Mandate by November 9, 2021. Please access ACMS to document your request and provide further details about your need for a medical and/or religious exemption by completing the appropriate electronic request form. Complete the form in its entirety to ensure that your request is fully considered. ACMS will acknowledge receipt of your request and produce a unique identification number for your request. You must also report your vaccination status in VSS indicating that you are not vaccinated. This ensures accurate tracking of your vaccination status pending a determination on your exemption request and to maintain data integrity throughout DHS.

If you do not have access to ACMS, you can [download](#) the requisite Vaccine Exemption Request forms from the DHS.gov website and complete and submit your request form to your servicing Disability Program Manager (DPM) or Reasonable Accommodation Manager (RAM) for further processing.

After review and consideration of your request, you will be provided with a written determination on your request and, in the case of a denial, the next steps for full Mandate compliance.

Q7. I had an exemption request pending before (the date of the issuance of these FAQs). Do I need to file another request?

Yes. Requests submitted prior to the issuance of these FAQs or outside of ACMS may not provide all of the necessary information for full consideration of the accommodation request. Please resubmit your request pursuant to the process outlined in response to Question 6 above.

Q8. What forms or documentation am I required to submit to support my request for a medical or religious exemption from the Mandate?

A: In addition to the information you provide on the request form(s), you may be asked to submit additional information about the basis of your request (whether it is based on a disability, medical condition, or religion), including an explanation of how the Mandate conflicts with your disability, documented medical necessity, and/or religious belief, and the specific accommodation(s) requested. For vaccine exemption requests based on a sincerely held religious belief or practice, additional information regarding the nature of the belief and how the Mandate imposes a substantial burden on the practice of your religion may also be requested.

Q9. Who will make the determination regarding whether I should be granted an exemption from the Mandate?

A: Determinations on requests for exemptions from the Mandate will be made by designated component-specific boards composed of senior officials, who will be advised by appropriate medical, legal, human resources, and civil rights offices.

Q10. What factors will be used to evaluate my request for an exemption to the Mandate?

A: Requests for exemption based on disability or religion will involve an individualized assessment prior to a determination. Relevant factors for consideration may include, but are not limited to, the basis for your request; the nature of your job duties and responsibilities; the number of employees in the workplace who reportedly are already partially or fully vaccinated against the spread of COVID-19; the extent of your contact with other agency employees as well as non-employees who may be ineligible for a vaccination or whose vaccination status may be unknown; and the reasonably foreseeable effects or impact of an exemption on the agency's operations, including the increased risk of illness for unvaccinated employees and their unpredictable unavailability for duty for indefinite or potentially long periods of time, and protecting other agency employees and the public from the spread of COVID-19. These assessments are fact and context dependent.

Q11. Will I be subjected to disciplinary action if my exemption request is pending after November 22, 2021?

A: If you submit an exemption request by November 9, 2021, and complete the VSS to indicate you are not vaccinated because of a pending request by November 9, 2021, you will not be subject to counseling or discipline even if the request is still pending as of November 22, 2021.

Q12. Is the information about my medical condition and my religion submitted during the request for an exemption confidential?

A: Yes, DHS will maintain the confidentiality of your medical and religious information acquired during a request for an exemption from the Mandate. Boards making determinations regarding requests for an exemption and those serving as advisors to the Board will be provided such information solely on a need-to-know basis.

Q13. What happens if I submit an exemption request before the November 9, 2021 deadline, but have not yet received a determination by the November 22, 2021 deadline?

A: If you submit a request before November 9, 2021 and provide any additional documentation as may be requested, and a determination has not been made to either approve or deny the request by the November 22, 2021 compliance deadline, the agency will continue to consider your exemption request. You must also complete the VSS by November 9, 2021 to indicate your unvaccinated status. While your request is pending, you will not be subject to disciplinary action for failure to comply with the Mandate.

Q14. If my request for an exemption is denied, by what date must I receive the vaccine to fully comply with the Mandate?

A: If your request for an exemption is denied, you must immediately begin taking steps to become fully vaccinated by receiving your one-dose vaccine or the first dose of the two-dose vaccine within 14 days of the date of denial. If receiving a two-dose series, you must receive the second dose within 6 weeks of receiving the first dose. If you received a first dose of a two-dose series prior to requesting an exemption, you must receive your second dose within two weeks of the final determination to deny the accommodation, or within a week of the earliest day by which you can receive the second dose, whichever is later. You must also document your actions through the VSS after receiving each vaccination dose, including providing the requested vaccination information to demonstrate compliance with the vaccine Mandate.

Q15. If my request is denied, can I request reconsideration of the denial?

A: Yes. You may request reconsideration by submitting your request through the ACMS system or by contacting your Component's servicing DPM or RAM. If you request reconsideration of the Board's decision, you must comply with the Component's existing reconsideration procedures and established timeframes for like reasonable accommodation requests. Otherwise, if your request for an exemption to the Mandate is denied, that determination is final, and you must take steps to comply with the Mandate as instructed in your denial notification. You must also update the VSS after each vaccination dose.

Q16. Can I file an EEO complaint if my request for an exemption is denied?

A: Yes. You may file an EEO complaint by contacting an EEO counselor at your servicing EEO office within 45 calendar days of the date of the denial determination. Please note that this option does not delay the time provided to you to become fully vaccinated or otherwise exempt you from the requirement to comply with the Mandate.

Q17. Can I request an extension to the Mandate deadline due to a medical necessity, even if I am not an individual with a disability?

Yes. Generally, an extension will be considered based on medical evidence you submit supporting the request through the ACMS system. Although the process for requesting an extension is the same as requesting a disability or religious exemption, an extension, if granted, amounts to a temporary delay for full compliance with the Mandate. Extensions may be considered in very narrow medical circumstances. Requests for an extension must

be medically based and fully supported by medical documentation. For example, the CDC recommends delaying COVID-19 vaccination for at least 90 days after receiving monoclonal antibodies or convalescent plasma. A history of severe allergies after a previous dose or a component of a COVID-19 vaccine may be a contraindicator which might require a delay in getting a second dose of the same vaccine, but is not a basis for a delay in receiving, for the second dose, a different approved vaccine. You may also request a delay until you are fully recovered from acute illness and after mandated isolation after contracting COVID-19. For more information on the medical conditions that might support a delay in complying with the Mandate, discuss with your medical provider or consult the CDC website.

Q18. What happens if I refuse to get vaccinated or decline to provide information regarding my vaccination status?

A: If you fail to comply with the Mandate (absent an approved exemption or temporary delay) or refuse to disclose your vaccination status, you will be subject to progressive disciplinary action, including and up to removal from federal service.

Q19. I am an employee beginning employment with DHS after the Mandate was issued. Does the Mandate apply to me?

A: Yes. The mandate applies to all employees regardless of their employment start date. If you started your service prior to November 22, 2021, you must be fully vaccinated by the November 22, 2021 deadline, unless you request or have an approved exemption. Employees beginning employment after November 22, 2021 must comply with the Mandate prior to their start date.