



Berkshire Health Systems, Inc.

725 North Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201
(413) 447-2000

DATE: October 13, 2021

TO: The BHS Community

FROM: David E. Phelps, President and CEO

SUBJECT: Update on COVID-19 Vaccination Mandate

When we announced a COVID-19 vaccine mandate at Berkshire Health Systems two months ago, we knew that the vaccines were the most effective way to prevent serious illness, hospitalization, and death from the virus. Since that time, the CDC's research has only become stronger, reinforcing the effectiveness of vaccination—a September 2021 study showed that unvaccinated individuals were nearly 5 times more likely to become infected, 10 times more likely to be hospitalized, and 11 times more likely to die as a result of COVID-19 than vaccinated individuals.

By mandating the vaccine, we declared to our health system and to our larger community that we would be taking the strongest possible precautions to maintain a safe environment for our patients and our employees. Our vaccination rate has risen from about 80 percent in August to more than 98 percent at this time. I am grateful to each one of you who has been proactive and has taken this important step to protect our patients and advance the public health of the community we serve.

Our enforcement of this vaccination policy will likely result in employees losing their jobs; however, not taking advantage of the opportunity to be vaccinated creates a level of risk for our patients and our staff that we cannot accept within our facilities. As the Berkshires' leading healthcare provider, we must advocate for the best interests of our patients, our staff, and our community, even when the decisions involved are hard.

As of today's date, about 75 BHS employees have yet to receive their COVID-19 vaccination. We are taking steps to carefully review each of these cases with the employees involved to discuss the consequences of choosing to remain unvaccinated. Outcomes will include unpaid suspension, corrective action, or ultimately termination of employment. Those employees who have requested religious or medical exemptions will engage in similar conversations with Human Resources to determine if a reasonable, non-patient-facing accommodation can be made to their employment. Human Resources will act as quickly as possible to make a determination on each outstanding case and will inform staff of their employment status as soon as decisions are made.