



Berkshire Health Systems, Inc.

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DATE: August 6, 2021

TO: The Berkshire Health Systems Community

FROM: David E. Phelps, President and CEO

SUBJECT: Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination

For the past 18 months, our entire Berkshire Health Systems team has worked to protect our patients, our colleagues, and our community during the COVID-19 pandemic. As healthcare workers, we hold ourselves to the highest standards for infection control and prevention, and we rely on scientific data to guide our decisions. Research has proven that vaccines are the most effective way of preventing serious illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19. Even in cases where breakthrough infections have occurred in fully vaccinated people, symptoms are typically mild and most often have not required hospitalization. Emerging data from the CDC and FDA continues to reinforce that the vaccines are safe and effective, even in the face of the Delta variant, which is more contagious than previous strains of the COVID-19 virus and suspected to be the prevalent strain in Berkshire County and throughout the United States. The vaccines have proven so safe and effective, it is now expected that the FDA will provide full approval of COVID-19 vaccine use in the coming weeks.

Millions of people have taken the necessary steps to become fully vaccinated. Nationwide, the number tops 165 million and in Massachusetts, 4.3 million. According to the MA DPH Vaccination Report as of August 3, 68 percent of eligible residents (ages 12+) in our own Berkshire community have been fully vaccinated. At BHS, the rate of employees who are fully vaccinated is approaching 80 percent. We are grateful to each one of you for taking this important step to ensure a safe environment for your patients, your colleagues, your family, and your friends. Still, as healthcare workers, we have a duty to protect and care for our community that compels us always to do more.

Last week, the Massachusetts Health & Hospital Association (MHA) endorsed a statewide mandatory vaccination policy for all Massachusetts hospitals and health systems. As an active member of the association, we were pleased to join with 70 MHA-member-hospitals in affirming that vaccination against COVID-19 is the most effective way to prevent its spread and keep each other safe, and we pledged, alongside our peer hospitals across the state, to develop a mandatory vaccination policy. **With these actions in mind, we are announcing that Berkshire Health Systems will require all employees, caregivers, contractors, volunteers, and students working and learning within our health system be fully vaccinated by October 1, 2021.**

We will share additional details about our plans to implement this new policy, including specific religious/medical exemptions. We recognize that this decision may prompt questions or concerns among our team members; therefore, we will continue offering opportunities for employees to ask questions in group settings and through one-on-one counseling. We will also continue our practice of offering flexible vaccination hours and locations to accommodate staff on all shifts and at all facilities.

With COVID-19 infections on the rise in the Berkshires and across the nation, we must ensure that we are doing everything possible, including mandatory vaccination, to continue protecting this community and curbing the spread of the highly contagious Delta variant. Thank you all for doing your part to protect our patients, our families, and each other.