

SWHR COVID Vaccine Requirement

Revised September 14, 2021

Vaccine Requirement

Why are we requiring the vaccine?

As COVID-19 continues to spread throughout our communities, SWHR is taking necessary steps to protect employees, patients, and members of our community. Safety is our No. 1 priority.

We are in the fight against COVID-19 together and the vaccines are the best infection prevention tool we have. Evidence is strong that COVID-19 vaccines help prevent the spread of the disease and reduce the risk of hospitalization and death.

Is the Delta Variant more or less contagious/deadly than the original strain?

Viruses evolve over time to become more efficient, which is what has emerged with the Delta variant. It is spreading at a rate 100% (or two times faster) than the original Coronavirus and 50% more than the UK strain that we saw our surge from in December/January. The CDC recently stated that this strain is as contagious as Chicken Pox which is highly contagious. It is important to note that infections from the Delta strain are almost exclusively infecting those unvaccinated not utilizing additional tools such as social distancing and masking. Anyone infected can infect others. There is not enough data to establish if the Delta strain is deadlier than the prior strains. However, hospitalizations are increasing significantly with this strain, similarly to the prior surges.

Why is it important that everyone at SWHR get vaccinated?

People who become infected can inadvertently create the opportunity for new variants to develop and spread, like the Delta variant. The greatest concern would be that a new strain emerges resistant to our current vaccines. With current rates of breakthrough infections for those vaccinated, the risk of a new variant as well as further morbidity and mortality from Coronavirus decreases significantly with vaccination. The faster we can eradicate these variants, the faster all of us can resume activities safely.

What do I need to do to become “fully” vaccinated?

To be fully vaccinated, employees must have received both doses of Pfizer or Moderna or one dose of the Johnson & Johnson.

Where should I send verification that I have been vaccinated?

Verification should be sent to our confidential, clinical Employee Health Team at SWHREmployeeHealth@texashealth.org.

What documents are considered acceptable as verification that I have been vaccinated?

Acceptable documents include your CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Card or copy of vaccination from your physician, pharmacy, or medical clinic.

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Will I receive a response once I submit my information to Employee Health?

Yes. You will receive an acknowledgement from our Employee Health RN, Yolanda Haggerty.

Why are we not being given more time since there is a waiting period required between shots?

Employees have 63 days between the announcement of mandatory vaccines to the deadline of September 30th. Pfizer doses are spaced 21 days apart and Moderna doses are spaced 28 days apart. SWHR employees will be able to obtain their vaccine from THR. THR Employee Health teams across the system are adding vaccine clinic dates to offer convenient times to get the vaccine.

With COVID-19 case rates rising dramatically, we have no time to waste in doing everything we can to protect each other and the community.

Compliance with Vaccine Requirement

What does it mean to be fully compliant with SWHR's vaccine requirement?

To be compliant with SWHR's vaccine requirement, employees need to have either submitted verification of vaccination or have an approved exemption by September 30th. To be fully vaccinated, employees must have received both doses of Pfizer or Moderna or one dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

If I have only had one dose of Pfizer or Moderna, should I submit verification of my first dose to Employee Health now or wait until I am fully vaccinated.

If you have received only one dose of the COVID vaccine, please submit verification of that vaccination now and as soon as possible to Employee Health.

What will happen if I am not compliant with SWHR's vaccine requirement on September 30th?

- Employees who do not have an approved exemption OR have not provided **verification of at least one dose** of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine (or one dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine) by September 30th may continue to work and will have up to 30 days to get their 2nd dose. Any employee who remains non-compliant after this 30-day grace period will be voluntarily separated.
- Employees who do not have an approved exemption OR have not provided **verification of ANY vaccine dose** on September 30th will be suspended without pay effective October 6th. PTO may not be used during the suspension period. Such employees will have up to 30 days to become fully compliant. Any employee who remains non-compliant after their suspension period will be voluntarily separated.

Return to Office

When can I return to the office once I am fully vaccinated?

Employees must be 14 days past their last dose of the COVID vaccine to return to the office.

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If the current COVID surge is so bad, why are we still returning to the office?

We know many employees want to be back in an office setting where we can work more cohesively and collaboratively together. Being together in one location leads to increased innovation and faster, more creative problem solving. It is safe for us all to be together if we are vaccinated. The risk of breakthrough infections for those vaccinated is lower when social distancing and masks are utilized in common areas. We continue to monitor the latest data and CDC recommendations and will adjust our processes to continue focusing on our safety.

Why are remote workers required to get the vaccine?

SWHR employees may be called on to periodically enter care facilities, member homes, and into the office to support operational efforts. We need all employees to protect themselves, our patients, our providers and the community at large. We need to lead the way by helping to end this pandemic.

Will we still need to wear masks in common areas at work? If so, what is considered a common area?

Yes, we will still require employees to wear a mask in common areas of the office to keep all employees safe. Common areas include lobbies, elevators, breakrooms, hallways, work rooms, restrooms and conference rooms. There will be signs clearly designating these areas.

Will contractors, vendors and visitors be required to be vaccinated?

The vaccine requirement extends to all such third parties that come onsite to our office. Contractors or third parties who are not vaccinated may not come onsite.

Would you address those employees that interface with PCP clinics and their plan for returning to any in office risks and strategies and plans?

Many of our positions require interactions with clinics and patients for effective population health management. For those positions that do so, risk mitigation strategies, including vaccination, are key to be able to engage safely and effectively. Healthcare delivery has continued with very little risk of infection from Coronavirus for those vaccinated and following safe practices.

COVID Safety and Health Questions

Do I need to use Sick Time or PTO if I do not feel well enough to work after my vaccination?

Any employee who misses work time related to reactions from the COVID-19 vaccine should inform Employee Health at SWHREmployeehealth@texashealth.org and submit a report using the Employee Safety form in the SWHR Safety Learning System (SLS). Instructions about how to navigate to the SLS and submit your Employee Safety form. Employee Health can assist you with completing your Employee Safety form.

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If I experience an adverse reaction to the COVID-9 vaccine, how will that be handled?

SWHR subscribes to a state regulated insurance program. The Accident Fund is the insurance carrier that handles our claims. If an employee misses any work time and/or needs to seek medical treatment as a result of a reaction to the COVID-19 vaccine, they should notify Employee Health as soon as possible at SWHREmployeehealth@texashealth.org and submit a report using the Employee Safety form in the SLS. A Worker's Compensation claim would be filed on your behalf with The Accident Fund. The Accident Fund would then determine compensability and presumably cover medical expenses and temporary income benefits for time off work following a seven-day waiting period.

Will vaccine boosters be mandated as well?

We will continue to assess this need based on the CDC recommendations and peer-reviewed data.

What do I do if I've had COVID-19 recently?

Unvaccinated employees who have had COVID-19 should receive the first dose of the vaccine as soon as they are at least 14 days past their diagnosis date and 24 hours without fever. This approach aligns with what other health systems are doing regarding individuals who have had COVID-19.

Why do I need the vaccine if I've had COVID-19?

The antibody response from unvaccinated patients infected with a prior strain of COVID-19 was fourfold less potent against the Delta variant. However, vaccination of individuals with a prior COVID-19 infection boosted the immune response well above the threshold that would neutralize the Delta variant. With the growing presence of the Delta variant in the DFW region, a [study](#) just published reinforces the importance of vaccination, even if you have previously had COVID-19.

As observed in this [study](#), individuals with a prior COVID-19 infection who were vaccinated generated a neutralizing antibody response against the variants tested that was three to four times higher compared to vaccinated people who were not previously infected. These results indicate that vaccination in individuals with a prior COVID-19 infection provides broad protection against multiple variants.

Why aren't we waiting until the vaccines have full FDA approval?

The Pfizer vaccine has been fully approved by the FDA. The Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines currently being distributed in the US have FDA EUA approval. Emergency Use Approval ("EUA") still requires clinical efficacy from phases 1, 2, and 3 clinical trials to have been completed as well as demonstration of consistent and reliable production standards in order to obtain FDA approval. An EUA allows production of the vaccine at the same time as the clinical trials, so that when clinical efficacy and consistent production standards can be demonstrated FDA approval can occur and the vaccine would be immediately available for widespread distribution. The Pfizer vaccine has been given to more than 189 million individuals in the U.S. and more than 800 million worldwide. The data has remained consistent that the vaccine is safe and effective. In addition, studies have shown that the vaccine helps protect against new variants, such as the Delta variant.

A recent real-world [effectiveness study](#) from the United Kingdom demonstrated that in those who were fully vaccinated, the Pfizer vaccine reduced risk of hospitalization from the Delta variant significantly compared to individuals who are unvaccinated.

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Evidence continues to build that COVID-19 vaccines provide high degrees of protection against infection. Early on we had to rely on clinical trial data, but we're now seeing how the vaccine protects more people as they go about their daily lives. Data show that risk of COVID-19, including severe illness, is reduced by more than 90% among people who are fully vaccinated with one of the mRNA vaccines, the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. You can view the studies [here](#) and [here](#). Data also suggest that COVID-19 vaccines authorized for use in the United States [offer protection against most variants currently spreading in this country](#).

Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for individuals wanting to start a family, or who are pregnant or breastfeeding?

Individuals should consult their physician for questions specific to their situation. In general, though, it has been shown that the vaccine is safe for those wanting to start a family, as well as those who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

School is starting back up for kids, how is the Delta affecting kids?

The Delta variant is far more contagious than the original strain, and kids are becoming infected which puts those adults around these kids at risk, particularly those unvaccinated. Current data does not suggest that the Delta variant is more serious than the prior variants for children.

For those who have recovered from Covid, do you recommend both shots? Some sources suggest only one may be necessary.

The CDC based on levels of neutralizing antibodies circulating from those with prior COVID infections continues to recommend full vaccine with one of the three FDA approved vaccines. The existing antibodies from prior infection does not consistently remain at a level considered high enough to mitigate the risks associated with infection.

Vaccine Availability

How do I sign up to get a vaccine at THR?

To obtain a vaccine from THR, please follow the 2 steps below. If you need assistance, please reach out to Yolanda Haggerty or Brooke Aranda.

1. You will need to register for an account. If you do not already have account, you will need to register as a "New User" with THR Ready Set at: <https://texashealth.readysetsecure.com/rs/>.
2. To select and confirm your vaccine appointment, visit the THR "Sign Up Genius" at <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c054da8ac2aa6f94-covid191>.

Do I have to get the vaccine through THR?

No. You may choose to get your vaccination from your provider of choice. Please visit www.vaccines.gov to find a vaccination provider near you.