



**Questions & Answers on Advocates Incorporated's
Employee COVID-19 Vaccination Policy
9/15/21**

Abbreviated Policy (revised 9/15/21):

In preparation for anticipated state and/or federal COVID-19 vaccination guidance and regulations, Advocates is requiring that employees provide one of the following by October 1, 2021:

- A. Proof that the employee is fully vaccinated
- B. Proof that the employee has received the first dose of the vaccine
- C. A **request** for an accommodation

Requests for Accommodation:

Employees may request an accommodation to be exempted from providing proof of vaccination due to:

- 1) a medical condition; or
- 2) a sincerely held religious belief, practice, or observance that prevents the employee from receiving the vaccination; or
- 3) a weekly COVID-19 testing accommodation (requiring unvaccinated employees to produce a negative COVID19 test result on at least a weekly basis).

Please note:

- **The current complete policy can always be found on the “Information and Resources” section of the Advocates website:**

<http://www.advocatesincorporated.org/information-resources/>

- This policy will be updated once the state and/or federal government issues additional guidance and regulations on COVID-19 vaccination requirements and accommodations.

Policy updates will be communicated via email in addition to being posted in the Paycom Employee Self-Service “Documents” folder and posted on the website.

Q: Is Advocates going to require the COVID-19 vaccine? Is it being requested or mandated?

At this time, Advocates is not mandating the COVID-19 vaccine, Advocates is mandating that employees communicate with the agency.

This communication includes submitting either proof of vaccination or a request for an exemption/accommodation as described below.

Please see details within the “Proof of Vaccination”, “Medical Accommodation”, “Religious Accommodation” and “Weekly COVID-19 Accommodation” sections below.

Proof of Vaccination:

Please send proof of vaccination to: hrsecure@advocatesincorporated.org

or mail to Advocates Incorporated, 290 Elwood Davis Road, Suite 101, Liverpool, NY 13088 Attn: Human Resources.

Q: Is there a medical exemption? Is there a religious exemption? Will you offer weekly testing as an alternative?

Medical Accommodation Request:

- To **request** consideration of a reasonable accommodation because of a disability or an exemption due to a medical condition, employees must submit medical documentation.
- Medical accommodation requests must be completed by an appropriate health care provider.
- Documentation must be submitted via email to hrsecure@advocatesincorporated.org
- Please note: **If a medical accommodation is approved, employee may be required to produce a negative COVID-19 test result on at least a weekly basis.**

Advocates reserves the right to request additional relevant information and/or documentation to confirm an employee’s medical condition. Determinations will be made in accordance with state and federal guidelines.

Religious Accommodation Request:

- To **request** consideration of a religious accommodation based on a sincerely held religious belief, employees must [complete the “Request for Religious Accommodation” form by clicking here](#).

- **Please note: If a religious accommodation is approved, employee may be required to produce a negative COVID-19 test result on at least a weekly basis.**

Personal and/or philosophical objections are not considered sufficient justification for granting a request for accommodation.

Advocates reserves the right to request additional relevant information and/or documentation to confirm an employee’s sincerely held religious belief. Determinations will be made in accordance with state and federal guidelines.

Weekly COVID-19 Testing Accommodation Request:

- To **request** a weekly COVID-19 testing accommodation (requiring unvaccinated employees to produce a negative COVID-19 test result on at least a weekly basis), employees must [complete the “Request for Weekly COVID-19 Testing Accommodation” form by clicking here](#).

Q: When are you going to start requiring weekly testing? Is weekly testing being provided by Advocates? What is the procedure to notify you of my weekly test?

The White House plan states that employees will be able to “produce a negative COVID-19 test result on at least a weekly basis before coming to work”, why is the agency not guaranteeing this will be an option instead of asking employees to request it?

Please note, **Advocates is still awaiting guidance from the state and federal government to determine if providing a weekly negative COVID-19 test result will be allowable for our service.** If weekly testing is an option, Advocates will notify employees of the date it is effective and the procedure to submit proof of a negative test. Please see the “when will my medical, religious or weekly COVID-19 testing accommodation request be approved” question below for additional information.

Q: When will my medical, religious or weekly COVID-19 testing accommodation request be approved?

While Advocates is dedicated to giving our employees and families the respect of proactively communicating, Advocates and all other OPWDD agencies continue to await guidance from multiple regulatory agencies.

We cannot approve accommodations until we receive definitive guidance and regulations from the state and/or federal government. If Advocates is permitted to accept the accommodation, we will engage in an interactive dialogue with you to determine the precise limitations and explore potential reasonable accommodations that could overcome those limitations.

It is possible that we will receive regulations from one of more of the following federal and/or state agencies, each developing their own requirements.

Federal: Centers for Medicaid Services (CMS), Department of Labor (DOL)/Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)

State: NY State Department of Health (DOH), Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD)

As we have through the entire pandemic, we will continue to provide transparent and regular communication to our team members, self-advocates and families.

Q: Will employees be fired if they do not get the vaccine? Will I be able to continue employment without proof of vaccination? How is Advocates handling it if employees do not want to be vaccinated?

Although meeting the requirements of this policy is a condition of employment, **employees will not be immediately terminated on October 2, 2021.**

If an employee does not provide

- A. Proof that the employee is fully vaccinated; or
- B. Proof that the employee has received the first dose of the vaccine; or
- C. A **request** for an accommodation

by October 1st, Advocates will notify the individual receiving services/family that the employee has not met this requirement.

Human Resources will continue to attempt to contact the employee to ensure that they understand the process for submitting proof of vaccination and the process for requesting an accommodation.

Q: I already had COVID and don't feel like I need a vaccine because of natural immunity.

Please talk with your healthcare provider if you would like to request a medical exemption.

Q: Can a self-hired staff with self-direction get an exemption to not have the vaccine if the family signs off on it (and takes liability)? What if the family does not believe in the vaccination, will there be a waver form to sign for staff?

No, because Advocates is the Employer of Record, employees cannot get an exemption from a family and Advocates cannot accept liability waivers. Employees can submit a request for a medical, religious and/or weekly testing accommodation to Advocates for review.

Q: Is this going to be permanent, or will it be readdressed when Covid is under control?

This policy will be updated once the state and/or federal government issues additional guidance and regulations on COVID-19 vaccination requirements and accommodations.

Q: Do individuals/families we serve also need to get the vaccine?

Advocates' Employee COVID-19 Vaccination Policy pertains to Advocates' employees, it does not apply to individuals receiving services from Advocates or their family members who are not Advocates' employees.

Q: Are all employees who have contact with individuals required to be vaccinated or just Mentors?

Are Brokers and Coordinators required to be vaccinated? If someone works in the office are the requirements different?

I work for Advocates, but only work with my cousin - since we are family, do I have to be vaccinated if I only work with him?

Meeting the requirements of the Employee COVID-19 Vaccination Policy is a condition of employment for all employees. The policy is consistent for all employees.

Q: Will there be a limit to telehealth hours accepted to continue the relationship between individual and mentor?

Individuals should evaluate with their Care Manager and Planning Team to determine if telehealth or in-person services are the best option for them. The decision on whether to receive services via telehealth or in person and the hours of service should not be influenced by an employee's vaccination status.

Q: Will Advocates allow unvaccinated employees to wear proper PPE and still work?

Do you believe masks will once again be mandated in the near future?

Is Advocates still providing PPE for mentors now they are to wear masks indoors again even if vaccinated?

Employees who do not submit proof of vaccination must request an accommodation, in addition to wearing PPE.

Regardless of vaccination status, employees must continue to wear PPE such as masks/face coverings as detailed in Advocates' COVID-19 Safety Measures.

Please note: the current Advocates COVID-19 Safety Measures can always be found on the "Information and Resources" section of the Advocates website:

<http://www.advocatesincorporated.org/information-resources/>

Advocates continues to provide PPE upon request. To request additional PPE, please email supplies@advocatesincorporated.org.

Q: Are booster shots required for continued employment?

Will Advocates assist us with information & communication, on where and when booster vaccines will be available, as they did early on when the vaccine became available?

Will employment with Advocates place us at the front of the line for boosters the same way it did for the initial shots?

Advocates is not requiring proof of booster shots at this time.

Advocates does not have further details about state or government guidance on booster shots at this time but we will be proactive in sharing any pertinent information that we receive with our employees. Visit www.vaccines.gov/search/ or call 1-800-232-0233 for information on vaccine availability.