

## New Guidance for Federal Employees Seeking Exceptions to Vaccine Mandate

*The government has issued updated guidance for federal employees seeking an exception to the COVID vaccine mandate.*

By **Ian Smith** October 5, 2021 11:48 AM Categories [Human Resources](#) [Comments \(243\)](#)  
The federal government has unveiled additional guidance for federal employees who are seeking an exemption from [President Biden's COVID-19 vaccine mandate](#) for the federal workforce.

### Allowed Exceptions to Vaccine Mandate

The Safer Federal Workforce Task Force said that there are two exceptions federal employees can pursue in order to skip the vaccine: medical conditions and religious exemptions.

[According to the Task Force](#), agencies should provide their employees with a form to use when seeking a legal exception to the vaccine. The Task Force states:

*The information on the forms may be used by the agency to help determine whether the employee is entitled to an accommodation. The agency may also ask for other information as needed to determine if the individual is legally entitled to an accommodation. Agencies should consult with their senior agency official for privacy and their office of general counsel to address all legal considerations and privacy requirements in developing their forms, including but not limited to an appropriate Privacy Act Statement. Agencies should comply with any applicable recordkeeping and other requirements.*

The Task Force published templates for agencies to use to collect the requests from their employees. The [template for medical exceptions](#) requires a signed statement from the employee's doctor, and the [template for religious exceptions](#) asks the employee the following questions:

1. Please describe the nature of your objection to the COVID-19 vaccination requirement.
2. Would complying with the COVID-19 vaccination requirement substantially burden your religious exercise? If so, please explain how.
3. How long have you held the religious belief underlying your objection?
4. Please describe whether, as an adult, you have received any vaccines against any other diseases (such as a flu vaccine or a tetanus vaccine) and, if so, what vaccine you most recently received and when, to the best of your recollection.
5. If you do not have a religious objection to the use of all vaccines, please explain why your objection is limited to particular vaccines.
6. If there are any other medicines or products that you do not use because of the religious belief underlying your objection, please identify them.

7. Please provide any additional information that you think may be helpful in reviewing your request.

The Task Force also states that agencies should establish a date by which federal employees must notify their agencies that they are seeking an exception.

### Vaccination Required for Denied Exceptions

If a federal employee applies for a vaccine exception and it is denied, the Task Force states that the employee must get the first dose of the vaccine within two weeks of the final determination to deny the accommodation. If receiving a two-dose series, the employee must receive the second dose within 6 weeks of receiving the first dose.

Federal employees who are denied exceptions to the vaccine or who refuse to get the vaccine will be [subject to disciplinary action](#) up to and including removal or termination from their jobs.

### Safety Protocols for Non-Vaccinated Federal Employees

Federal employees who are not fully vaccinated due to either a religious or medical exception need to follow additional safety protocols in the workplace: physical distancing, wearing face masks, and applicable travel guidance. For these individuals, the Task Force also notes:

*Additional guidance will be forthcoming regarding testing protocols for individuals who are exempted from the vaccination requirement. There may be circumstances in which an agency determines that the nature of an employee's job responsibilities requires heightened safety protocols if they are provided with a legally required exception. In some cases, the nature of the employee's job may be such that an agency determines that no safety protocol other than vaccination is adequate. In such circumstances, the agency may deny the requested accommodation.*

### Additional Guidance

The Task Force also said in its updated vaccination guidance that federal employees who have previously been infected with COVID-19 are still required to be fully vaccinated and that federal employees cannot delay getting the COVID vaccine if they have gotten other vaccines (such as the flu vaccine) per CDC guidelines.

Federal employees currently [have until November 22 to get fully vaccinated](#), and the federal government can [begin enforcing the vaccine mandate on November 9](#).

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