



## ABPD UPDATED STATEMENT ON COVID-19 VACCINE MANDATES

The Association of Bioethics Program Directors (ABPD) represents the leadership of nearly 100 academic bioethics programs at medical centers and universities across North America.

It has been nearly four years since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and as the pandemic evolves and new information emerges, policy recommendations should change. As COVID-19 vaccinations became universally available in 2021, but uptake in some areas remained poor despite numerous attempts at education and incentive programs, the ABPD issued a [statement](#) and a subsequent companion piece in [Health Affairs](#) in support of – and providing ethical justification for – vaccine mandates for most persons, recognizing narrow exceptions.

Today, COVID-19 illness continues to occur at significant levels compared to other viral illnesses, and its patterns of re-emergence remain mysterious. Those who have never had the illness, never been vaccinated, or who are immune compromised continue to be at significant risk when they become infected. But recent disease variants have also had milder clinical outcomes across the population, due to some combination of widespread vaccination, infection-related immunity, better treatments, and changes in the biology of the virus. Our health systems are no longer at imminent risk of collapse from being swamped with unvaccinated ill patients. As a result, the daily disruptive threat of COVID-19 has decreased, which has allowed states and localities to lift both mask and vaccine mandates.

Following the same ethical principles that undergirded the ABPD's previous statement, which required balancing the liberty interests of individuals and the well-being of communities, the ABPD now supports policy decisions to lift COVID-19 vaccine mandates, while continuing to recommend that most persons should be vaccinated and boosted against COVID-19.

Future changes might again justify mandatory vaccination—particularly for those in specific professional roles, such as health care workers—if, for instance, a more lethal variant were spreading rapidly, threatening once again to overwhelm health care resources, and if a highly effective and safe vaccine against this variant were available.

Vaccination against COVID-19 using updated boosters remains perhaps the single most effective tool to protect individuals against serious illness and long COVID. **The ABPD continues to support widespread, freely available, and equitably delivered vaccination against COVID-19 for both children and adults.**

*25 September 2023*

*Supported by at least 2/3rds majority vote of ABPD membership*

*\*This statement reflects the views of the ABPD and its membership, not those of the programs the members direct nor their affiliated institutions.*