

Recent Federal Decisions Are Paving The Way For More Workplace Vaccine Mandates

Michael Marks & Caroline Covington

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs recently announced that [the agency will now require](#) its medical employees and those working in VA medical facilities to be vaccinated against COVID-19, which could be a sign of things to come for the American workplace at large.

[Rekha Lakshmanan](#) is director for advocacy and policy at the Immunization Partnership, and a contributing expert to the Baker Institute for Public Policy at Rice University. She told Texas Standard that the VA's decision, plus recent court decisions about employer vaccine mandates, as well as other federal decisions, are indicators that workers could see of some sort of vaccine rule at their own workplace soon.

“These instances are setting some precedents, and kind of illustrating what, you know, employers can do,” Lakshmanan said.

One of those instances was a dispute over a vaccine mandate at [Houston Methodist Hospital](#). Over 100 employees argued that the mandate was illegal. But a U.S. district court judge ruled that it didn't violate any state or federal law.

The U.S. Department of Justice reinforced that message by announcing Monday that [nothing in federal law prohibits](#) vaccine mandates in public agencies or private businesses.

Despite pushback from some, Lakshmanan says vaccine mandates aren't new. Schools and universities have required vaccines for years against disease like measles and hepatitis B as a condition of enrollment. And Lakshmanan says those mandates do help get more people vaccinated.

“We've had, you know, vaccine requirements for many, many, many years. And so we have seen that requirements or mandates are effective in terms of achieving high vaccination rates,” she said.

While incentives can also help motivate hesitant people to get a COVID-19 vaccine, Lakshmanan says neither incentives nor mandates should take the place of good education about why vaccines are important.

“Be patient, listen to their questions, answer their questions. And that, along with any additional incentives, should hopefully motivate someone to ultimately get themselves vaccinated or get their family members vaccinated,” she said.

This story has been updated to correct errors in the guest's affiliations.

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