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## **OCHSNER HEALTH ANNOUNCES EMPLOYEE VACCINATION MANDATE TO ENHANCE PATIENT AND COMMUNITY SAFETY**

### ***Vaccination Requirement Follows FDA's Full Approval of Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine***

**New Orleans, La. (August 24, 2021)** – Following full approval of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine by the Food & Drug Administration (FDA), Ochsner Health (Ochsner) announced a mandatory requirement that all its physicians, providers and employees be vaccinated against COVID-19 by October 29, 2021. This formal announcement comes as the Gulf South continues to face high COVID-19 positivity rates, hospitalizations and deaths. Today, Ochsner is caring for 979 COVID-19 patients. More than 88%, 865, are unvaccinated.

Louisiana currently ranks 46<sup>th</sup> in the country for vaccinations, with only 39 percent of Louisiana residents fully vaccinated against COVID-19. **Approximately 69 percent of Ochsner Health employees are vaccinated.**

Ochsner announced the vaccine mandate as Louisiana battles a fourth surge, with the highly contagious Delta variant leading to increased positivity rates and record-setting hospitalizations over the last month. On August 9, 2021, Ochsner Health had 1,093 patients hospitalized for COVID-19, more than any other point in the pandemic, and unvaccinated patients continue to account for nearly 90% of hospitalizations.

“Healthcare workers have experienced unbelievable challenges and sacrificed so much over the last 18 months to keep our patients and community safe. We owe them a debt of gratitude, and more than that, we owe them meaningful action,” said Warner Thomas, President and CEO, Ochsner Health. “This policy is the right thing to do to protect our employees, their families, and our patients.”

Over **163 million Americans have been fully vaccinated** and more than **4.91 billion vaccine doses have been administered** around the world, and the data continue to show that the vaccines are safe and effective. According to the CDC, the approved vaccines have undergone and will continue to undergo the most intensive safety monitoring in U.S. history. Guidelines from the CDC state no adults should be excluded from receiving the vaccine unless they have had a severe allergic reaction after a previous dose of the vaccine or severe allergic reaction to components of the vaccine.

“Ochsner cares for physically vulnerable people, and we have an ethical obligation to protect them from COVID-19,” said Dr. Robert Hart, Chief Medical Officer, Ochsner Health. “As we are in the midst of another surge due to the Delta variant, we need to stop this virus in its tracks.

Vaccination is the only way, and as healthcare providers, it is our responsibility to lead by example, while protecting our employees and our patients from the spread of this highly contagious Delta variant.”

The American Medical Association and the American Nurses Association are just two of nearly 60 major medical organizations that have called on healthcare professionals to get vaccinated against COVID-19. Most healthcare workers in Louisiana must already receive annual flu shots as well as immunizations for measles, mumps and other infectious diseases.

This vaccination mandate includes all leaders, physicians, employees and new hires and applies to clinical and corporate full-time and part-time workers at Ochsner Health owned facilities. In addition to employees, all vendors, medical and allied health students, contract employees, PRN, agency nurses and volunteers will also be required to demonstrate proof of vaccination before rounding or working at an Ochsner Health campus.

Ochsner has many different partnerships with healthcare organizations across Louisiana and Mississippi. Some partners have already secured an approval vote on their vaccination policy through their individual Boards of Directors, while others continue to discuss the issue. Leaders and governing bodies for affiliated and partner facilities will determine and communicate timing for mandates at their facilities.

Ochsner’s new policy follows months of internal encouragement and education. Employees have been offered additional vacation time and 24-hour vaccine availability. Vaccine experts have hosted Q&A sessions, one-on-one meetings and made rounds with vaccine carts to answer questions and make vaccination as convenient as possible. Ochsner will continue to offer its employees and community members ongoing opportunities to learn about the vaccine and how it works.

“Many people who are not getting vaccinated are citing information that is not accurate. I implore anyone who is unsure about the vaccine to reach out to their physician to discuss their concerns. We remain committed to serving as a resource and source of truth for our employees, patients and community members,” said Thomas.

He continued, “And for those who are not getting vaccinated because they do not believe the virus will make them seriously ill, we need your help to protect not only yourselves, but others, like young children who do not have the option to get vaccinated. As a community, we must come together to stop the virus from spreading to kids and others who are vulnerable to infection.”

Cases of COVID-19 infection among children are increasing as the Delta variant spreads and with no vaccine currently authorized for children under the age of 12. In August 2021, Ochsner has admitted 26 children to its hospitals for COVID-19, the highest number throughout the pandemic.

For additional information about the COVID-19 vaccine, please visit [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov). To schedule your vaccine appointment, please visit [ochsner.org/vaccine](https://ochsner.org/vaccine).

#### **About Ochsner Health**

*Ochsner Health is a system that delivers health to the people of Louisiana, Mississippi and the Gulf South with a mission to **Serve, Heal, Lead, Educate and Innovate**. Ochsner Health is a not-for-profit committed*

*to giving back to the communities it serves through preventative screenings, health and wellness resources and partnerships with innovative organizations that share our vision. Ochsner Health healed more than 900,000 people from across the globe in 2020, providing the latest medical breakthroughs and therapies, including digital medicine for chronic conditions and telehealth specialty services. Ochsner Health is a national leader, named the top hospital in Louisiana and a top children's hospital by U.S. News & World Report. As Louisiana's leading healthcare educator, Ochsner Health and its partners educate thousands of healthcare professionals annually. Ochsner Health is innovating healthcare by investing in new technologies and research to make world-class care more accessible, affordable, convenient and effective. Ochsner's team of more than 32,000 employees and 4,500 providers are working to reinvent the future of health and wellness in the region. To learn more about Ochsner Health, please visit [www.ochsner.org](http://www.ochsner.org).*

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