

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

GREG GIANFORTE
GOVERNOR



KRISTEN JURAS
LT. GOVERNOR

February 10, 2022

Open Letter to Montana's Valued Health Care Professionals

Dear Health Care Professionals:

First and foremost, I write to thank you for your tireless work and dedication to serving all Montanans, especially amid a pandemic. I'm grateful for what you've sacrificed to keep our communities healthy and save countless lives. Since taking office, I've visited with and heard from many of you, and I recognize that you've added shifts, worked longer hours, and assumed additional duties and responsibilities to serve, treat, and care for Montanans around-the-clock. Your efforts are nothing short of heroic, and we are fortunate to have such dependable, hardworking health care workers in our state.

I want you to know I'm wholeheartedly committed to defending Montanans against discrimination based on their vaccination status. As many of you are aware, President Biden's COVID-19 vaccine mandate for certain health care workers was allowed to go into effect by the U.S. Supreme Court for now, and workers at covered facilities must receive a vaccine dose or have a pending or approved application for exemption by February 14. Legal questions remain unresolved by the Supreme Court's decision, and the State of Montana will continue to press its claims that the mandate is unconstitutional or otherwise unlawful in the district and appellate courts.

In the meantime, however, I urge those of you who are unvaccinated to consider using the religious and medical exemption processes that your employers are required to offer, as well as to talk to your colleagues or personal health care provider about getting vaccinated. My administration's guidance on the mandate, permitted exemptions and delays, and a template religious exemption form may be found prominently in a red box at dphhs.mt.gov. For your convenience, I also attach the form here.

Thank you again for your commitment to keeping our communities and Montanans healthy. As Montanans who have faced a longstanding shortage of health care professionals, we simply can't afford to lose you, your colleagues, your experience, and your compassionate, dedicated care due to President Biden's vaccine mandate.

I look forward to continuing to work with you to advance the health of our great state. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me for anything. My door is always open to you.

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Greg Gianforte, written in a stylized, cursive script.

Greg Gianforte
Governor

**Application for Exemption from COVID-19 Vaccination
Requirement on Religious Grounds***

Employee Name: _____

Employee Number/SSN: _____

Employee Email Address: _____

Employee Telephone Number: _____

Employee Position and Duty Location: _____

I certify that immunization against COVID-19, or being vaccinated with any of the COVID-19 vaccines (Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine, Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine, and Janssen COVID-19 Vaccine), is contrary to my religious belief, observance, or practice.

Accordingly, I request exemption from the COVID-19 vaccine requirement imposed pursuant to CMS's Medicare and Medicaid Programs: Omnibus COVID-19 Health Care Staff Vaccination.

Signature of Employee

Date

* Under applicable federal law, an individual can seek a religious exemption regardless of whether the religious beliefs, observances, or practices are common or non-traditional, and regardless of whether they are recognized by any organized religion. "Religion" includes "all aspects of religious observance and practice as well as belief," not just practices that are mandated or prohibited by a tenet of the individual's faith. A belief is "religious" if it is "religious" in the person's "own scheme of things," i.e., it is a "sincere and meaningful" belief that "occupies a place in the life of its possessor parallel to that filled by . . . God." An employee's belief, observance, or practice can be "religious" even if the employee is affiliated with a religious group that does not espouse or recognize that individual's belief, observance, or practice, or if few – or no – other people adhere to it. Religious beliefs include "moral or ethical beliefs as to what is right and wrong which are sincerely held with the strength of traditional religious views."