

# Court Case About Vaccine Mandate

September 15, 2021, Wednesday

As you know, New York State has issued a broad COVID-19 vaccine mandate for all health care workers. That mandate is still in place. The state also prohibited hospitals from exempting their employees from the mandate for religious reasons. Yesterday, a federal judge in upstate New York issued a ruling that could ultimately lead to the availability of religious exemptions.

While this issue works its way through the legal system, Mount Sinai is going to resume accepting and reviewing applications for religious exemptions. Here is what this means:

- Until the final court ruling, any exemptions that are granted will be conditional. Employees with conditional exemptions can work and receive pay, but will need to be tested weekly for COVID-19.
- If the final court ruling supports the state's position to prohibit religious exemptions, employees with conditional exemptions will have to be vaccinated within a week to retain their employment. Those who refuse to be vaccinated will be placed on leave without pay for a week and, if they are still unvaccinated, will be terminated the following week.

**If you already applied for a religious exemption**, you need to do nothing; your original application will be reviewed.

**If you haven't already applied but want to**, you may do so at [this portal](#); you must do so by 5 pm this Saturday, September 18.

We know this is confusing and we know some of you must be very frustrated at this process. We are doing our best to manage a complex legal situation and believe this is the best path forward.

In the meantime, we want you to know that we take this process seriously and respect the deep feelings and beliefs that many of you hold. All religious exemption requests are

reviewed in a very careful, thoughtful process by a committee composed of clergy members and religious leaders, clinical experts, and human resources and other key personnel. They review applications anonymously. Neither of us is part of this committee; we want this to be an independent, confidential process. No exceptions or decisions will be made outside this committee process.

**I am not vaccinated and want a religious exemption; what should I do?**

If you would like to apply for a religious exemption to the vaccine mandate but you have not yet done so, please submit your application [through the portal](#) by 5 pm on Saturday, September 18.

**What if I applied for a religious exemption through the portal earlier this month?**

Your application will be automatically considered by the committee.

**What does a conditional approval mean?**

Religious exemptions will only be approved on a conditional basis while this issue is being adjudicated in court. Once the court ruling is final, the exemptions will either become fully approved—if the court ruling says religious exemptions must be allowed—or will be revoked, if the court says the state can prohibit them.

**If I receive a religious exemption, do I have to be tested?**

Any employee who receives a conditional or full religious exemption will be required to undergo weekly PCR testing for COVID-19 while the exemption is in effect. We will provide details about the testing program soon.

**I emailed my manager, HR representative, or other Mount Sinai leader with my religious exemption request; does that count?**

No. All religious exemption requests must be submitted [through the portal](#). This allows us to ensure that the process is fair and comprehensive. If you sent your request somewhere other than the portal you must now also submit it through the portal for it to be considered.

**How do I know when a committee decision is made?**

When you submit your application, the process includes submission of an email address. The committee will send a reply to the email address you identify in the application.

Thank you for your patience and cooperation. We will update everyone as soon as we have new information.

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