

To Protect Public Health and the Future of our Economy, Private Sector Vaccination Requirements are an Extraordinary but Necessary Step

Throughout our 75-year history, the Bay Area Council and its member companies have been committed to ensuring the Bay Area is the best place to live and work in the nation. The COVID-19 pandemic has been the greatest disruption to our way of life and our economy since the Second World War. Last year, extraordinary public health measures were taken to limit the potential for mass casualties and permanent devastation. Masking, social distancing and shelter-in-place orders mitigated massive harm even as the pandemic has killed more than 600,000 Americans and counting, caused millions to experience symptoms that will have ongoing impacts to their quality of life and ability to work, and resulted in a cost to our economy that is still being felt.

The rapid spread of the highly contagious Delta variant should be a clear and dangerous reminder that we continue to be in a race against the spread and constant mutation of this virus. Thus far, only 56 percent of the US population is fully vaccinated, leaving tens of millions of unvaccinated individuals through which the virus will spread and mutate. Vaccination rates are not uniform across the country, and our region has done better than most, but high-risk areas remain and ongoing surges will eventually stretch or break through hospital capacity.

Interventions such as stay-at-home orders and social distancing can slow the tide of infections, but they are disruptive, difficult to sustain, and will further hamstring our economic recovery. Restarting mask mandates will help but cannot be as effective as vaccination. Testing, isolation, and contact tracing of infected individuals all have a role in reducing infections but our collective experience to this point clearly shows these approaches are not sufficient to stop the spread and mutation of the virus. We must continue to trust the science and public health officials and make sound, evidence-based decisions.

In the absence of a legal, public mandate to vaccinate, the next and necessary step is for private businesses and institutions to require vaccination among employees returning to in-person work and customers for whom vaccination is a medically safe choice. Health care organizations across the nation have begun to take this step, and private businesses such as Google, United Airlines, and Facebook have followed. As leaders that have a stake in the health of our region and economy, it is time for us to stand unified and support requiring vaccination against COVID-19, excluding those with religious or medical exceptions, as a condition of on-site employment or receiving services. The Bay Area Council has always been a leading and trusted voice in the community. While this statement does not represent an endorsement of specific legislation at any level of government, making such a recommendation will demonstrate that business leaders across the region understand that a flourishing economy relies on a healthy population.

The choice is ours, we can and must follow the example of prior leadership that led our nation out of harm's way through vaccination. It is the surest path to a return to prosperity, health, and security.