California Folds; Says Asymptomatic COVID-Positive Health Workers Can Get Back To Work Amid Shortages

Description

USA: The California Department of Public Health issued guidance that allows health care networks to enable COVID-19-positive employees to keep working if they don't show any symptoms.

> "The department is providing temporary flexibility to help hospitals and emergency services providers respond to an unprecedented surge and staffing shortages. Hospitals have to exhaust all other options before resorting to this temporary tool. **Facilities and providers using this tool, should have asymptomatic COVID-19 positive workers interact only with COVID-19 positive patients to the extent possible**," the Department of Public Health said in a statement to news outlets over the weekend.

The Epoch Times has contacted the agency for comment.

Health care workers in the state now don't have to isolate or show a negative COVID-19 test, the guidance said, before coming back to work if they are asymptomatic. The guidance, which remains in effect until Feb. 1, stipulates that staff wear N95 respirator masks while on the job.

After the guidance was handed down, several unions that represent nurses and other hospital staff expressed alarm.

> **"Healthcare workers and patients need the protection of clear rules guided by strong science. Allowing employers to bring back workers who may still be infectious is one of the worst ideas I have heard during this pandemic, and that's really saying something,"** Bob Schoonover, the head of union SEIU California, told CBS Sacramento.

Schoonover added that while **his union supports "supplemental paid sick leave,"** the latest guidance imperils a "critical piece of the protection that workers and the public need."

The president of the California Nurses Association, Sandy Reding, told local media that the California health department's guidance will put patients at risk.

> **"We are very concerned,"** she told [KNTV news](#).

> **"If you have health care workers who are COVID positive care for vulnerable populations, we can spread the COVID virus inside the hospital as well."**

Union officials did not mention the rampant staffing issues that have plagued hospitals across the United States and California in recent days.

Mandates that were put into effect last year by California Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, required health care workers to get COVID-19 vaccines or face termination—despite studies showing that natural immunity conferred by a previous COVID-19 infection shows lasting immunity to the virus. Critics of vaccine mandates have questioned why governments and businesses would impose vaccinate or fire policies for "essential workers"—such as nurses and doctors—in the midst of staff shortages during a viral pandemic.

Health giant Kaiser Permanente [suspended](#) more than 2,000 employees who were not vaccinated in October. Other California systems such as Santa Clara Valley Medical Center and Sutter Health [also terminated](#) or suspended their employees who weren't vaccinated in the fall of 2021.

Meanwhile, Dr. George Rutherford, professor of Epidemiology at the University of California San Francisco, told KNTV that the guidance revision isn't anything new.

> **"This is about having infected people taking care of infected people.** We did this with Ebola in South Africa. We've done it before. It's not the first play option in our playbook. I think staffing issues are such that it led the state to put this guidance out," he told the outlet.

It comes days after the Newsom administration [mandated](#) that booster shots be given to certain health care staffers by Feb. 1. On Friday, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, issued said she would issue a directive for all health care workers in the state if signed off by a public health advocacy board.

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