



SAINT MARY'S AT ASBURY RIDGE

*This communication was sent in an email on November 12, 2021.*

**Saint Mary's & COVID-19: Update #73**

Good Afternoon!

Saint Mary's continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic as Erie County remains in a high transmission status and the positivity rate is over 13%. Twice-a-week we are routinely testing unvaccinated employees; residents with outside contact no longer need to be tested routinely. Please remember that facemasks continue to be required at all times in the facility.

We have been administering the flu vaccine to residents and employees and at the end of October, COVID-19 booster clinics were held with the assistance of Walgreens.

Many of you are curious about our response to the vaccine mandate. On November 5<sup>th</sup>, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued a vaccine mandate. The CMS ruling, separate from the OSHA regulation, requires all providers who accept Medicare or Medicaid reimbursement to develop a policy of mandatory vaccination by December 5<sup>th</sup>, with enforcement to begin on January 4, 2022. Violations will not only result in lack of funding but in significant fines.

Saint Mary's has notified our employees that documentation of a first dose must be received by December 5<sup>th</sup> and full vaccination must be completed by January 4<sup>th</sup>. Staff who fail to meet the December 5<sup>th</sup> deadline will be removed from the work schedule until their first dose is administered. If staff do not meet the January 4<sup>th</sup> deadline, they will be considered to have voluntarily terminated their employment.

Unvaccinated staff may request a medical accommodation or a religious exemption, however it is not guaranteed that such a request will be granted. Even if eligible for an exemption or accommodation, the CMS ruling states that staff may not be allowed to return to work if their presence would pose a risk to the health, safety and welfare of other staff or residents. Each request will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

While the ruling does not impact visitors or family members at this time it does extend to volunteers, clinical students, board of trustee members, vendors and other service providers who are routinely in the building. We are working to obtain proof of vaccination from these individuals as well.

As of last week, 80% of employees and 96% of residents were vaccinated against COVID-19. A number of unvaccinated employees have begun the vaccination process while others have informed us they will be leaving. While it is regretful we have come to this point and we respect that this is difficult for many, we know that vaccines are the best means – supported with masking, hand hygiene and distancing – of keeping our communities as safe and healthy as possible.

If you have any questions, please let us know. Thank you!