



Stanislaus County Superior Court
800 11th Street
Modesto, California 95354

NEWS RELEASE: Court Adopts Vaccine Requirement

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The Stanislaus County Superior Court will require all of its employees to be vaccinated as a condition of employment no later than 45 days after the Food & Drug Administration gives final approval to at least one COVID-19 vaccine, Presiding Judge Robert B. Westbrook and Court Executive Officer Hugh K. Swift announced today. The Court's announcement comes as COVID-19 cases in Stanislaus County have increased to their highest levels since February 2021, with more than 90% of new cases being reported in unvaccinated populations - including children under 12, who are not currently eligible to receive any of the vaccines.

"This was a difficult but necessary decision," Presiding Judge Westbrook said. "I believe that implementing this policy is in the best interests of our entire community."

Presiding Judge Westbrook explained that Court employees are considered essential workers – similar to healthcare providers – because they are required under state law to deliver time-sensitive and emergency services during crises. At the same time, the Court has a duty to do everything it can to protect the people it serves - including jurors, attorneys, witnesses and victims - from exposure to COVID-19. "The vaccines are the best tools we have in our toolbox to fight this deadly virus."

Since the very beginning of the pandemic, Presiding Judge Westbrook noted, the Court has strictly followed guidance issued by public health agencies including the Centers for Disease Control and Stanislaus County's Health Services Agency. "Given the high transmissibility of the Delta variant and the currently surging number of COVID-19 cases in Stanislaus County, the Court determined now was the time to act. We need to be out in front of this virus," Presiding Judge Westbrook emphasized.

"Despite the tremendous impact of the virus, the Court has focused on its core mission of providing access to justice while prioritizing the health and safety of the community," added Court Executive Officer Swift. Within a few days of the announcement of the statewide "stay at home" order in March 2020, the Court began implementing remote appearances in many case

types. In June 2020 the Court mandated that face masks be worn in all Court facilities and set a capacity limit for its main facility to allow for social distancing. "Although the CDC mask mandate was briefly lifted in June 2021, the Court decided to continue its mask requirement in light of the low vaccination rate in Stanislaus County," Swift stated. "The resurgence of COVID-19 since that point and the CDC's recent renewed guidance regarding masks demonstrates the Court's cautious and consistent approach was correct."

Swift also outlined some of the details of the new vaccination policy, including:

- Any employee with a medical condition that prevents them from receiving a vaccine, as verified by their medical provider, will be excused from the vaccination requirement;
- Any employee with a confirmed, sincerely held religious belief that prohibits them from receiving a vaccine may request that they be excused from the vaccination requirement as an accommodation. The Court will review any requests for accommodation on a confidential, case-by-case basis consistent with the Americans With Disabilities Act;
- All employees who are either medically excused or are granted an accommodation will be required to undergo a weekly test for COVID-19; and
- Employees will be required to submit proof of their vaccination status to the Court through an electronic portal. All information will be kept confidential.

Presiding Judge Westbrook added, "In solidarity with our Court family, I have also asked the judges to submit their vaccination information. We are all in this together and we must all do our part."

"I am not a scientist," Presiding Judge Westbrook concluded, "but it is crystal clear to me that vaccinating as many people as possible is our best chance to beat COVID-19 once and for all. The longer we wait to get vaccinated, the more likely it is that the virus will mutate and find a new way to infect us. The available vaccines are safe, effective, free and are necessary now more than ever. The Court feels strongly that this is the right thing to do for its employees and the public we serve. We sincerely hope other Stanislaus County employers will join us in prioritizing the health and safety of our community."

For questions related to the Court's vaccine policy, please contact Court Administration at (209)530-3111.

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