

Aug 3, 2021 - Axios Denver

Denver rolls out its first vaccine mandates



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Denver Mayor Michael Hancock in November. Photo: Hyoung Chang/The Denver Post via Getty Images

CORONAVIRUS VACCINATION RATES.

Why it matters: Top state and local officials agree that thousands more residents need to get the jab — and now — if Coloradans want to avoid another devastating blow this fall and winter.

Driving the news: Denver Mayor Michael Hancock on Monday [announced a new vaccination requirement](#) for the city government's 10,000-plus employees. The city also will invoke its police powers to force private-sector workers in "high-risk" environments to receive the shot, the first major city to do so.

- Private sector employees covered under the new mandate include those working in nursing homes, homeless shelters, hospitals, correctional facilities, and schools and post-secondary institutions — both public and private.
- After Sept. 30, unvaccinated employees won't be allowed to work onsite or in the field.

What they're saying: "After all of our efforts, we're seeing a spike when we generally would get a little bit of a seasonal break. ... Coupled with that concern is the fact that vaccinations have largely stalled," Denver public health director Bob McDonald said at a briefing Monday.

- "We need to make sure we're ahead of this so that we don't see another spike in deaths going into the fall," he told reporters.

- City attorney Kristin Bronson tells Axios that Denver's authority to do so derives from a [1905 U.S. Supreme Court decision](#) recognizing state and local governments' "police power," which includes mandates issued to protect public health.
- Violators could be fined up to \$5,000 under a new [ordinance](#) passed by the City Council Monday night, or face potential jail time.

By the numbers: About 70% of eligible Denver residents are fully vaccinated, but McDonald said more shots are needed to combat the city's increasing infection rate.

- City data shows that the average number of daily infections has recently jumped from 15 to nearly 70.
- A recent return-to-work survey showed more than 70% of city employees planned to get vaccinated, but actual rates are unknown, a spokesperson for Denver's health department told Axios.

The big picture: Gov. Jared Polis, in a briefing moments after Hancock's, echoed Denver's urgency as hospitalization rates rise, saying the state expects it "to get worse before it gets better."

