

New Bedford city employees subject to vaccine mandate Nov. 15

The City of New Bedford released details of its new vaccine policy for nearly 900 municipal employees today, following up on an August announcement.

With this step, the City seeks to set an example for public and private employers in Greater New Bedford by adopting a vaccine mandate to protect staff and residents.

Under the policy, non-school City employees are required to submit proof of their COVID-19 vaccination status by Nov. 15, or submit results of a negative COVID-19 test on a weekly basis.

The City's AFCSME union and firefighter union approved the policy, which also covers non-union City employees. Altogether, the groups represent 882 of the City's 1,112 non-school employees.

The New Bedford police union (230 members) has not reached agreement with the City, and its members are not subject to the new policy. Collective bargaining negotiations with the police union continue.

As of Nov. 15, any employee covered by the policy who has failed to comply will be placed on unpaid administrative leave. While on leave, employees will be allowed to use accrued vacation or personal time; use of sick time is not authorized under the policy. Continued non-compliance will be grounds for disciplinary action.

With local vaccination rates remaining low, the early adoption of a municipal employee vaccination/testing requirement is a

clear signal that the City's proactive pandemic response will continue. It is hoped that this mandate will encourage other local institutions and employers to adopt similar policies for their employees.

The announcement is consistent with the proactive approach New Bedford has pursued since the beginning of the pandemic. New Bedford has been in the vanguard of cities that established model initiatives to curb COVID-19, including becoming the first city in the country to provide a free mask to city residents, taking steps to protect workers at seafood processing facilities, mandating stringent safety requirements at industrial facilities, safeguarding nursing homes and senior living facilities, opening local COVID-19 surge facilities, and offering incentives for vaccines in neighborhood locations across the city.

"Our Health Department and local health providers have worked tirelessly to make vaccines readily available, but as we approach a third year of this pandemic, we need to do more," Mayor Jon Mitchell said. "Requiring the City's non-school employees to be vaccinated can protect our workforce and their families, and encourage other employers to follow suit."