

COVID-19 Vaccination Requirement

Dear Team DNR,

As the leader of this agency, my first priority will always be creating and maintaining a safe work environment for every DNR employee. As public servants, the employees of DNR – often literally – put their lives on the line to serve the people of Washington. In recognition of the sacrifices and risks you take, I will always ensure that our agency and its leaders are doing everything we can to keep you safe and healthy. You deserve nothing less.

As we all are aware, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to threaten the health and safety of our communities, including our work community at DNR. The COVID-19 delta variant is widespread and has resulted in increased transmissions, hospitalizations, and death. Of particular note, there has been an increase in cases of COVID-19 among our wildland firefighters, which impairs our ability to fight wildfire and protect Washington's lands and people.

One of the most inspiring characteristics of DNR – from our firefighters on the frontlines to our foresters in the field – is the care and respect we have for one another. We are an agency of mutual respect, cooperation, and collaboration.

Fundamental to this ethos of care is a simple principle: I will look out for my colleagues just as my colleagues look out for me. That means, when necessary, taking every reasonable step to ensure the health of ourselves and coworkers.

That is why, after thorough consideration, I am requiring all DNR employees be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by October 18, 2021. This is consistent with measures recently announced by the Governor and other state agencies.

Public health experts agree that vaccination is the best course of action to defeat the threat posed by COVID-19. In this moment, we must come together and take action to protect ourselves, our colleagues, and our families from this virus.

Importantly, we are immediately putting in place measures to make vaccinations available at fire camps, whenever possible, in order to reduce the logistical burden for our wildland firefighters.

Additional details of this requirement:

- This applies to all DNR employees, regardless of whether they are working remotely or at a DNR facility.
- This applies to all volunteers and interns, and to all on-site contractors. On-site contractors means contractors that enter DNR facilities.
- Fully vaccinated means two weeks after the second shot of the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine, or two weeks after the single shot of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.
- Employees must provide DNR with proof of being fully vaccinated.
- Employees, due to a sincerely held religious belief or medical condition, may request an accommodation through DNR's formal process.
- Employees who are not fully vaccinated by October 18 will be subject to non-disciplinary dismissal from employment for failing to meet the qualifications of the job.
- Wildland firefighters and members of incident management teams who are deployed to fires and, due to fire activity, are unable to be fully vaccinated by October 18 will be granted a two week extension to November 1, 2021.

We have provided notice to our union partners in accordance with DNR's collective bargaining agreements. Employees can direct questions to their union representatives, supervisor, or Human Resources.

Although this step is unprecedented, so too is the threat COVID-19 poses to our employees. That is why I approached this decision in the same manner I approach all decisions related to the health and safety of you and your colleagues, by asking: will this action significantly increase the health and well-being of DNR employees? In this case, the answer is unequivocally yes. The threat COVID-19 presents is clear, and the protections afforded by vaccination are equally clear.

We must act now, together, to protect ourselves, our colleagues, and the entire DNR community.

In partnership,
Hilary