NEWS

NYC Teachers Union Fights For Medical And Religious Exemptions To COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate

BY DANIELLE FUENTES
ST. READ · 4MO · 0 COMMENTS

UFT President Michael Mulgrew is pictured with vaccination advocates at a rally in Brooklyn's Sunset Park. (Courtesy of UFT)

The New York City teachers union has formally requested the state to intervene against Mayor Bill de Blasio's vaccine mandate for all city Department of Education employees, calling it "draconian" and a violation of due process with less than two weeks to go until the first day of public school September.

The union said the city's not cooperating in carrying out medical and religious exemptions to the vaccination mandate, which goes into effect September 27th for 148,000 DOE employees. That includes teachers, administrators, cafeteria workers and custodians who must show proof of at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine by the effective date.

The vaccine mandate "eviscerates the due process and collective bargaining rights of educators who could lose their livelihoods, health benefits and pensions, and disregards those who for whom vaccination is medically contraindicated or violates a sincerely-held religious belief of employees," the union said in a filing with the state Public Employment Relations Board Wednesday. They added that in recent bargaining sessions the city has shown it "has no intention of budging from its inflexible stance or allowing the UFT to any meaningful bargaining concerning the implementation of the City's vaccination policy."

In a statement, DOE spokesperson Danielle Filson said, "The health and safety of New York City children and the protection of our employees is the sole aim of the vaccine mandate. We will continue to negotiate with the UFT to reach a successful agreement because that is what's best for our school communities."

The PERB will mediate a session between the union and the city, according to Chalkbeat. If there is no agreement, the UFT and the city will then head to arbitration.

The vaccine mandate for the DOE employees is one of the strictest for a city agency, with no option to provide negative COVID test results instead to continue working inside a school building.

De Blasio's mandate goes further than the policy that he had announced earlier this summer for all city workers, including teachers, that requires weekly tests or weekly testing. It applies to the city's traditional public schools and includes any charter schools that are co-located with them. The mandate does not apply to pre-K teachers at community-based organizations outside the city's school buildings, bus drivers or private schools. The latter can set their own rules and are governed by the state.

The city hasn't specified what will happen to non-compliant DOE employees, with de Blasio saying on August 23rd that City Hall would be working through the penalties" and that "there will clearly be consequences if someone doesn't comply." De Blasio said the city would handle DOE employees' medical concerns on a case-by-case basis. "If someone has a serious medical condition, that's something we'll work with doctors to address," he said.

But the UFT said negotiations with the city have now stalled over whether employees with medical issues or employees with religious objections to the vaccination mandate could work remotely.

"According to city negotiators, those with medical issues could stay on the payroll until their sick days are used up, and then go on unpaid leave, while those with religious objections would immediately go on unpaid leave. In both cases those on leave would lose not only their salaries but also their health insurance," the union said in a statement Thursday.

The UFT said it supports vaccination and safe COVID-19 classroom practices in general, noting that nearly 90% of its union membership have gotten vaccinated. The union also agreed with city officials that the DOE's COVID-19 protocols "thus far have resulted in schools being among the safest public spaces in New York City," the union filing said.

New York state banned religious exemptions for student vaccinations in 2019. Clinical trials and real-world assessment of the vaccines so far have shown that the only medical condition that could prevent people from getting the shot is a severe allergy, which has only occurred in 2 to 5 people per million when administering the Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccines. Even in those cases, doctors can reverse the consequences with allergy meds.

The UFT filing also noted that Governor Kathy Hochul has spoken about the possibility of weekly testing in absence of a vaccination mandate for school districts across the state.

Other labor groups have filed legal actions against the vaccine mandate. "DC 37 — which represents school aides, lunchroom workers and other staffers along with thousands of other city employees — said it would file an unfair labor practices complaint with the state," the Associated Press reported. The Municipal Labor Committee also voted to take legal action and force the city to negotiate details of implementation, including penalties and exemptions.

NYC news never stops. Get the Gothamist Daily newsletter and don't miss a moment.
Your email address
By clicking SIGN UP, you agree to receive marketing emails from Gothamist and other properties from WNYC Studios. We will never share your information with third-party companies. See our Terms
SIGN UP

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION | BRETTON STANDISH OF TRAVERSE | BERNARD SANDERS | MICHAEL MULGREW

Do you know the scoop? Comment below or Send us a Tip

Gothamist Comment Policy
Gothamist welcomes relevant, constructive, and interesting comments. Please be respectful and stay on topic.
Please read our Comment Policy before commenting.

87 Comments Gothamist & Disqus' Privacy Policy Login
Recommend Tweet Share Sort by Oldest
Join the discussion…
LOG IN WITH or SIGN UP WITH DISQUS
Name

jay z. dem · 1 day ago

Can someone name an actual mainstream religion that is against this vaccine? Even the Church of Scientology tells their followers to decide.

10 4 1 · Reply · Share ›

Joey Buttons Was Shadow Banned · 1 day ago · edited 1 day ago

Confusing religious medical reasons (of which there are nearly zero, as the article mentions) and "sincerely held" religious beliefs is pure Grade A BS. No good on the Union for turning even more into a circus.

BUTTUS! Just tell the you need a "sincerely held belief" and it will all be gravy.

Pretty interesting that kids in NYC can't have religious exemptions (which I assume still also apply when COVID vaxx is mandatory for students), but adults can intentionally minimize their religion to get one.

1 0 · Reply · Share ›

DonnaeGrandi · 1 day ago · edited 1 day ago

Joey Buttons Was Shadow Banned

I don't know of any religion worth its salt that prohibits vaccinations.
Even Hare Krishnas aren't against it
https://www.vaxfamilies.com/...

Edit: I think Scientology is a metric ton of bullshit so didn't consider them. Wouldn't be surprised if they don't allow vaccines.

1 0 · Reply · Share ›

Joey Buttons Was Shadow Banned · 1 day ago · edited

We are seeing diseases publicly disappearing with the Italians, fundamentalist religions (and evangelical/orthodox religious sects) are the Wild West.

1 0 · Reply · Share ›

DonnaeGrandi · 1 day ago

Joey Buttons Was Shadow Banned

All the evangelicals. And of course the US is home to the largest proportion of them.

1 0 · Reply · Share ›

Joey Buttons Was Shadow Banned · 1 day ago

Yeah, Catholic Professionals are against the vaccine mandate. Whole churches nationwide have pre-printed letters. But honestly, none of them is necessary as religious belief is ultimately an individual decision.

1 0 · Reply · Share ›

billy · 1 day ago Joey Buttons Was Shadow Banned

Yeah, I'm Catholic and I'm not against the vaccine. I can't imagine I'm not in such rare Preservation of the Sunga everything, jan pleuch kind of mindset. Sure, it ain't relize would have to do some serious twisting to advise my flock otherwise. Even Pope Francis hasn't been the Conservative bad-ass he had, so I learn, receive, dispensation in the preservation of life.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Adam Sicher · 1 day ago · 10 hours ago

the cult of the permanently of sand relizi would be sufficient for a few ultra radical fanatics to kill for it ... but they are few and far between.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Yachtgoodbadass · 10 day · 10 hours ago

Preservation of the Sunga almost everything. But more to the point, not a single sect is against modern medicine (which includes vaccines).

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

mom · 9 day · 10 hours ago

Writer I agree with you there are sects in Judaism that are anti-vax. Remember Jehovah's Witnesses don't transfusion I think, and you know they would go anti-vax except charge? I think it was against a religion. Those kids are all grad's and are now immune. They aren't immune.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Adam Sicher · 9 day Joey Buttons Was Shadow Banned · 10 hours ago

SOME ultra orthodox are. But many aren't Depends on the sect.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Joey Buttons Was Shadow Banned · 1 day ago · 1 hour ago · edited

Yeah, I'm Catholic and I'm not against the vaccine. I can't imagine I'm not in such rare Preservation of the Sunga everything, jan pleuch kind of mindset. Sure, it ain't relize would have to do some serious twisting to advise my flock otherwise. Even Pope Francis hasn't been the Conservative bad-ass he had, so I learn, receive, dispensation in the preservation of life.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Chuckie Incandenza · 1 day ago · edited · 1 day ago

Just tweeted at dog post about this to clarify and she did not answer back.

10 1 · Reply · Share ›

DonnaeGrandi · 1 day ago · 1 hour ago · edited

Chuckie Incandenza

Dmeeh, nuff said.
At least he tried. Kudos to an open mind.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

WHYCR · 1 day ago · edited · 1 day ago

Those sects are continually proving some variety Catholic bishops (over JA) using focus for disease. Yet they quickly come out against that. No other religious objections, this ones that are most hawkish are the Christian Jews as we see with the measles outbreaks.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Frank Grasman · 1 day ago · 1 day ago

Jewish religious law going back centuries (possibly millenia) is extremely clear that Jews are required to preserve their health and life and that vaccinations are a mitzvah (a religious imperative) to follow. The classic example of this principle are strong on the Sabbath in order to take someone to the hospital and violating the Rom Kippur fast if a doctor determines that someone is from observing it safely.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Joey Buttons Was Shadow Banned · 1 day ago · 1 hour ago

Unfortunately, many laboures seem to disagree with that interpretation.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Adam Sicher · 1 day ago · 1 hour ago

vaccines SAVE lives, just that in the pipes to smoke. They do and yes they get sick and die.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

M · WHYCR · 1 day ago

Mandated County here. Those guys are the worst.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Scrimpy · M · 17 hours ago

You have plenty of people in Rockland who aren't Ultraorthodox who are lunatics refusing to get the vaccine to over the top. Their numbers dwarf the Hasidim.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

M · Scrimpy · 17 hours ago

Most of Spring Valley - what groups? Not sharh.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Scrimpy · M · 15 hours ago

Lots of Sloop Peals, for starters. Trump county North Rockland in general is a huge cult.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

M · Scrimpy · 14 hours ago

Nagh - I'm in the bubble of New City. Ugh

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

David Grossman · 1 day ago · edited · 1 day ago

Interesting that the Orthodox sects of the Roman Catholic Church (standard to the use of brief calls to developing some of the vaccine but The Vatican has clarified that Catholics can and should get vaccinated anyway.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Joey Buttons Was Shadow Banned · 1 day ago · 1 hour ago · edited · 1 day ago

Interestingly, those same diocesses (it's looking at New Orleans have been completely silent on RELIGIOUS RELIGIOUS vaxx exemptions. Yet, they have been very vocal about the MANDATORY RELIGIOUS vaxx mandate. Which is a bit ironic, but The Vatican (which seems very affectionate has been promoted online by Rick Santorum). Santorum has been much less praising of the COVID vaccine. The second largest investor in Regeneron (the monoclonal antibody treatment for coronavirus) is the Vatican.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

WHYCR · Joey Buttons Was Shadow Banned · 1 hours ago

Don't know that, thanks for the update on the latest GOP religious sham.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Eric in BR · 1 day ago · 1 hour ago

Mideoval has entered the chat

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Robert · 1 day ago · 10 minutes ago

The Mideoval is to be extremely anti-sex. Although I wouldn't call them mainstream.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

CoMEX · 1 day ago · edited

I'm a fully vaxed DOE teacher. I would rather my union put their resources in fighting to make sure that these classrooms are well ventilated, disputing that stupid and inefficient COVID testing policy (The DOE's testing protocol is a joke, it's not even close to what other districts are doing), and negotiating for students in places. I still don't understand how there can be social distancing in these classrooms, with all the students back in person. There was barely any space for students in the classroom when the kids were mostly remote. This is going to be a clusterf**k...

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

WHYCR · CoMEX · 1 day ago

Same here sister, we should make our students and parents comfortable and concentrate on the health and safety of everyone.
Ventilation and masks Please!
Can't imagine any patient that wouldn't want their school vaccinated!

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Joey Buttons Was Shadow Banned · WHYCR · 1 day ago

Yeah, I'm sure that the Pandemic mandate mandates don't apply to the fully FDA approved Pfizer vaccine.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

WHYCR · Joey Buttons Was Shadow Banned · 1 day ago

That's be picking a fight with the parents, they'll hopefully enact next year
Ok, I'm sure that Joey from not and Mary from not and Mary from not

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Jason P · CoMEX · 10 hours ago

What's the stupid and inefficient Covid testing policy? Isn't the new plan be vaxed or get sick? No exemptions up to testing.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

CoMEX · Jason P · 10 hours ago

Kids it up... That is definitely not the plan for students...

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Jason · CoMEX · 10 hours ago

I can't find the article, but I don't know what the plan is... I hate this about everything. I'm a fully vaxed adult and I'm not sick. I don't want to be sick if I get to the person, if they aren't private, I can respond to it but they don't have what I posted. Bla bla bla.

Kids are sick and they are to be tested? But I agree with your post about putting resources into classrooms. I could see the union fighting for social distance for bad reactions, but beyond that no. Vaccines protect everyone.

And just so you know, I'm not against the vaxx, I'm against support. Education should be every city and towns biggest budget item. Teachers should never have to buy their own supplies. But I also want your school vaxxed because we getting digitale as a nation.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

CoMEX · Jason · 10 hours ago

For some reason, Gothamist won't approve my comment with the link. Just Google "NYC DOE Covid Testing Protocol" and it's the first result. It's a joke. It's not what about 3.-5% Daily Rates also have an article about it as well. This is the part...

"Health officials will provide random COVID-19 tests for 10% of unvaccinated staff and students twice a month at each of the city's roughly 1,800 public schools. That's a more than four-fold decrease in the rate of testing them last school year, when there were random tests for 20% of each school population each week.

Unvaccinated students will not be forced to consent to in-school COVID-19 testing but will face a much later months of test refusal."

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Stephen · 1 day ago

Zero exemptions. Zero exceptions. Fully vaccinated or no teaching. Go simple. I have no idea why this is even a thing?

10 1 · Reply · Share ›

WHYCR · Stephen · 1 hours ago

Because the Republicans and the Legal crack has taking over, the media gives them priority over the cast majority that get their shots.

Same with the numers, they put the doctors and nurses in the same boat when they don't explain that 80% of doctors are fully vaccinated.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Mazie · WHYCR · 1 hours ago

Whats the fad is wrong with you? You can't force people to take experimental medication and vaccines against their will. Is it the vaccine even if you do not even if you or another doesn't get it.

Its absurd that this is even a discussion. If people don't want the vaccine that's their choice, let them get tested periodically.

You people are beginning to sound like Nazis.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Sun Ra · Mazie · 1 hours ago

"If the vaccine works why do you care if a co-worker doesn't get it?"

There is no vaccine yet for children under 12. Pediatric doctrs want unvaccinated people around children to be tested. Kids can't get vaccinated, but can be vaccinated. They have the freedom to quit. Every child who attends school is mandated to get various vaccines before being admitted. that's been the case for years. We are being told teachers to the same standard as we do their children.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Mazie · Sun Ra · 1 hours ago

Being forced to get isn't freedom. It's creeulsm. And I'm sure there are exemptions for kids who have issues with it because of religion or health.

If they did weeks testing the everyother city job, most risk is mitigated.

Kids are very resilient against covid, and aren't really at risk 99.9% will recover fine.

Taking risks is apart of life. You have higher risks of dying in a car accident when you drive your child to school than your child getting covid. Yes, I'm sure they will get the vaccine, but don't force your nonsense on healthy people who don't want to take a strange Mrna vaccine.

You people are so afraid of a virus that you forget how to live.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Jonathanism · Mazie · 1 hours ago

Mazie, I'm sorry that you are so afraid of the vaccine that you are willing to endanger your children's health and lives. Kids are very resilient against covid, and aren't really at risk 99.9% will recover fine.

0 0 · Reply · Share ›

Anyone who has had a severe reaction to any vaccine should avoid getting the covid vaccines. That is a very small number, but it is a very real number. My wife's colleague, for instance, has Gulliane-Barre which was triggered by a vaccine and partially paralyzed for a short time.

While it's critical to get as many DOE teachers and staff vaccinated as possible, "herd immunity" should allow for those with medical exceptions to add very little risk. People shouldn't have to give up their pensions and careers if they have a legitimate medical reason to not take the vaccine.

1 · Reply · Share ›

Fool · a day ago

Draconian is not getting a vaccine to prevent death or major illness to yourself and others. A medical belief against science shows you have no place teaching students in civilization and should be fired regardless.

12 · Reply · Share ›

Waldo → Fool · an hour ago

There is something seriously wrong with you.

If you're precious vaccine works, why does it matter if someone doesn't want to participate?

You have 99.9% odds of beating covid. It's just a nasty flu. If you're that scared of a cold, go get the vaccine. But if youre a healthy person there is no need to gamble and take an experimental MRna vaccine.

You fascists are on a little power trip. There needs to be massive class action lawsuits against the city. What happened to my body my choice?

Reply · Share ›

Sum Gui → Waldo · an hour ago

Sue away, the anti-vaccine folk like you will lose.

1 · Reply · Share ›

slowp · a day ago

The union kinda has to do this, but I assume leadership is hoping they lose.

2 · 2 · Reply · Share ›

bf → slowp · a day ago

Why?

2 · Reply · Share ›

TheOriginalSobchak → bf · a day ago

Because *everything* has to be "collectively bargained". They cave on this, and in the eyes of union leadership, it opens the door for the city to make other demands without them having a say.

8 · Reply · Share ›

bf → TheOriginalSobchak · 21 hours ago

So I figured but jeez - give them a Starbucks gift card and be done with it.

2 · Reply · Share ›

Joey Buckets Was Shadow Banned → bf · 21 hours ago

Nah, there are emergency exceptions both contractually and under common law. The executive has BROAD powers. It's lazy to say that everything needs to be collectively bargained because it just isn't true.

2 · Reply · Share ›

Load more comments

Subscribe · Add Disqus to your site · Do Not Sell My Data · DISQUS

Recent in News

Rattles And Tinhorns: A Sketchy History Of Policing In New York Until 9/11

JIM O'GRADY, WNYC

Extra Extra: Canada Needs Our Love And Tourism Dollars Again

SOPHIA CHANG

Incoming Lieutenant Governor Brian Benjamin Will Have A Seat At The Table

DAVID CRUZ

Featured in News

How Homeless New Yorkers Rode Out Ida's Punishing Rain

Gothamist/WNYC spoke with a few homeless and unstably housed New Yorkers about where they sought shelter during the deadly downpour.

ALEX WILLIAMSON

READ MORE IN: News · Arts & Entertainment · Food · Election 2021

BACK TO TOP

gothamist

Gothamist is a website about New York City news, arts, and events, and food, brought to you by New York Public Radio.

Sign up for our newsletter! Share your email address to get our top stories each day.

your@email.com

By submitting your information, you're agreeing to receive communications from New York Public Radio in accordance with our Terms.

ADVERTISING · CONTACT US · RSS FEED · STAFF · DIVERSITY [DEI]

NEW YORK PUBLIC RADIO

FOLLOW US

© 2021 NEW YORK PUBLIC RADIO. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

TERMS OF USE · PRIVACY POLICY · ACCESSIBILITY