

Adams Lauds Biden's Emergency Workforce Safety Standard on COVID-19



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Chair Adams Lauds Biden Administration's Emergency Workforce Safety Standard on COVID-19

Safety standard comes after months of work from Chair Adams & Chairman Scott

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congresswoman Alma Adams (NC-12), Chair of the House Education & Labor Committee's Subcommittee on Workforce Protections, lauded today's move by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue an emergency workplace safety standard requiring employers with 100 or more employees to ensure all their workers are vaccinated or produce a negative test on a weekly basis.

"Today's new rules will save lives," **said Chair Adams.** "OSHA's emergency workplace safety standard is welcome relief from our current pandemic of the unvaccinated. Under the leadership of President Biden, OSHA has proactively addressed the COVID-19 crisis to help the United States get back to work. Workplace vaccination requirements are no different than the vaccination requirements for every kindergartener who enters elementary school: they exist so our families and children can be safe. I applaud today's decision by OSHA, and as Workforce Protections

Chair I will continue to fight for workplaces and schools that are safe from COVID-19.”

Chair Adams has led the fight against the pandemic in the workplace since January 2020:

- In January 2020, Adams joined **House Education & Labor Committee Chairman Bobby Scott** in calling on the Trump Administration to put the infectious disease standard back on the active agenda. In that letter, they also urged OSHA to issue a compliance directive for the health care sector, and to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard if the situation deteriorated. At the time of their request, there were only 5 confirmed COVID-19 infections in the United States.
 - Hearing nothing back, on March 5th, they wrote OSHA again describing how hundreds of health care workers had been exposed and stated the obvious: that OSHA urgently needed to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS).
 - In mid- March, OSHA rejected the issuance of an ETS on the grounds that “the health care industry fully understands the gravity of the situation and is taking the appropriate steps to protect its workers.”
- In April, with more than 720,000 infections nationwide, OSHA finally issued enforcement guidance, but only covering the health care sector.
- On April 21, **Chair Adams introduced** the ***COVID-19 Every Worker Protection Act***.
 - If passed, the Act would have required the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard that establishes a legal obligation for all workplaces to implement infectious disease exposure control plans to keep workers safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Adams remarked, “Essential workers on the front lines of this pandemic – and future pandemics – shouldn’t be made to feel like they’re expendable. When these workers go home, they go home to families, pets, and children who are all vulnerable if the Department of Labor does not take action. That increases the spread

of the disease and makes all of us more vulnerable. The COVID-19 Every Worker Protection Act would change that by strengthening protections for frontline workers and requiring employers to treat the essential workers who serve us every day with humanity and dignity.”

- On May 14, **Chair Adams held a briefing** to examine the worker safety crisis caused by COVID-19, continuing to push for an ETS to protect workers and workplaces.
- In mid-May 2020, as workers continued to face risk of infection, illness, and death, the Trump Administration still refused to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard to protect workers from exposure to the coronavirus. In response, **Chair Adams convened a meeting of the Workforce Protections Subcommittee**, one of the first virtual Committee meetings of the pandemic.
 - In her **opening statement**, Adams asked “why is OSHA missing in action?”
 - In the **most shocking moment of the hearing**, a Trump Administration official, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Loren Sweatt, revealed OSHA is not tracking workplace cases of coronavirus or enforcing laws meant to keep workers safe.
 - In response, **Adams remarked**, “Today, we found out that the dereliction of duty at OSHA goes beyond not issuing an emergency standard. It even goes beyond not proactively preventing infections. Our subcommittee found out OSHA is not even tracking workplace cases of coronavirus, nor is this enforcement agency enforcing the law. OSHA’s representative was evasive and had plenty of excuses, but had no answers for the millions of Americans who have no idea whether or not their workplace is safe. They just don't seem to care.”
 - After the meeting, Adams continued to push the Trump Administration for an ETS.
- During its final months in office, the Trump Administration never issued an ETS on COVID-19. It did, however, **issue policy change** that would result in sharply reduced reporting of COVID-related workplace hospitalizations and

fatalities and undermine efforts to protect the safety of workers.

- Chair Adams and Chairman Scott **responded to the change**, noting, “This guidance will eliminate, for all practical purposes, reporting of a work-related COVID-19 (COVID) illness.”
- After taking office, the Biden Administration immediately issued an **executive order** on workforce safety, **almost a year after Chair Adams and Chairman Scott’s original request**.
- On February 22, 2021, Adams **reintroduced a bill** to address the rising rates of workplace violence due to the pandemic.
- On March 11, 2021, Chair Adams held **a hearing on Science-based strategies** to protect workers from COVID-19 infections.
- On October 26, 2021, Chair Adams **pushed for an ETS on vaccine requirements**.
 - Adams noted, “Workplace COVID-19 outbreaks are continuing to endanger workers and their families. And many of these outbreaks have been linked to unvaccinated workers. Thankfully, we’ve seen responsible employers take the initiative to implement workplace safety policies, including vaccination requirements, to keep their employees safe. Some of the largest employers in the country, including Bank of America in my district, already have vaccination requirements. And more companies are stepping up to require vaccinations each week. After months of the vaccine being free and available, it is clear that the most effective way to boost vaccination rates is through workplace vaccination requirements.”

Background: The importance of vaccination requirements:

The spread of COVID-19 has caused the worst worker safety crisis. Hundreds of thousands frontline and essential workers have contracted COVID-19, and many died as result.

- COVID-19 has caused more deaths among workers in a shorter period of time than any other health emergency since the establishment of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 50 years ago.
- Throughout the pandemic, major outbreaks across the country have been associated with workplace transmission of the virus.
- **Many essential workers at the greatest risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19 are people of color.**

Vaccines are the most powerful tool we have to save lives, end the pandemic, and get back to normal.

- **According to recent CDC research**, people who are fully vaccinated are roughly one-tenth as likely to be hospitalized and even less likely to die from COVID-19 than those who are unvaccinated.
- Despite robust vaccination campaigns and efforts, **over 80 million adults are not fully vaccinated against COVID-19.**
- **Unvaccinated workers have been linked to workplace COVID-19 outbreaks** – putting seniors, people with disabilities, patients recovering from COVID-19, and others in danger
- Low vaccination rates have consequences for both vaccinated and unvaccinated Americans. The latest surge of COVID-related hospitalizations have overwhelmed hospitals that were already facing staffing shortages and limited capacity to treat non-COVID illnesses.

The private sector has demonstrated that vaccine requirements have overwhelmingly positive outcomes, including increasing vaccination rates and protecting vulnerable workers.

- **Workplace COVID-19 vaccine requirements have significantly increased vaccine** uptake among essential workers in recent months, pushing vaccination rates closer to 90 percent in a short period of time.
- Some of the largest employers in the country, including Bank of America in Rep. Adams' district, already have vaccination requirements.
- Although several surveys of unvaccinated workers predicted

workers would choose to resign if their employers required COVID-19 vaccinations, **recent data suggests that a vast majority of unvaccinated workers choose to get vaccinated in response to employer policies.**

- **The majority of Americans support mask policies and vaccine requirements.** Moreover, the country has always had vaccine requirements – including for polio and smallpox.

Congresswoman Alma S. Adams, Ph.D. represents North Carolina's 12th Congressional District (Charlotte, Mecklenburg County) and serves as Vice Chair of the House Committee on Agriculture. Additionally, she serves on the House Financial Services Committee and the House Education & Labor Committee, where she serves as Chair of the Workforce Protections Subcommittee.

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