New CMS Rule Requires Vaccination for Healthcare Workers in Montana

RiverStone Health, St. Vincent Healthcare and Billings Clinic are committed to caring for our patients and community, and we will always seek to deliver that care in the safest way possible. We also remain committed to complying with all requirements and regulations surrounding the safe and high-quality delivery of healthcare in the communities we serve.

Recently, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued its final interim rule that requires most Medicare and Medicaid certified providers to ensure that their staff is fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Failure to comply with the CMS COVID-19 Health Care Staff vaccination rule could result in monetary penalties, denial of payment or termination from Medicare and Medicaid programs for our three (3) programs.

Bottom line, to ensure that we can continue caring for tens of thousands of patients covered by Medicare/Medicaid, we are requiring our healthcare workers to become vaccinated against COVID-19 as outlined by the final interim rule. The interim final rule allows for exemption from the vaccination requirements and each of our organizations are in the process of planning for the collection and evaluation of those requests.

It’s important to note that the CMS interim final rule is different from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Emergency Temporary Standard, which was also issued on Friday, November 5. The CMS final interim rule specifically preempts the applicability of any state or local law to the contrary and therefore this rule supersedes Montana House Bill 702. We recognize that several states have challenged the CMS rule but that because the first compliance deadline is three weeks away, our organizations are proceeding with plans and processes to comply with the CMS rule.

COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective, and they reduce hospitalizations and death. As healthcare providers, it is our duty and obligation to care for and protect individual patients, including the most vulnerable among us, as well as ensure the health and well-being of our community. Therefore, we are complying with the requirements as outlined in the CMS interim final rule.

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