

Commissioners approve a vaccination, testing, face-covering policy

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
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Municipalities across the U.S. have until Jan. 21 to prove their employees are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or that they are willing to do weekly testing, thanks to a new mandate put in place by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

With the new mandate, McKinley County had to develop its own policy regarding vaccinations, testing, and face coverings. County commissioners met on Jan. 11 to discuss the issue, and ultimately approved a policy, although Commissioner Billy Moore, Dist. 1, said they “made it as light as [they] could.” This is the first time the county has approached the topic.

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OSHA'S mandate states that any employer with at least 100 workers must comply with the rules. In an interview with the *Sun*, Moore said that the commissioners changed the county policy wording to say "may" instead of "shall."

"We still want to encourage our employees to be vaccinated to protect themselves, but also we're trying to not infringe on everybody's rights to their freedom of choice," Moore stated. "We're still following the guidelines, but we're not being as strict as we could've been."

Commissioner Robert Baca, Dist. 3, said he sees the policy as a way to encourage people to get vaccinated.

"People are going to do what they want to do, so the way I read [the policy] is that we're not forcing anybody," Baca commented. "We're encouraging people to get vaccinated, and I think everybody's encouraging people to get vaccinated, and the option is if you don't want to be vaccinated, they're going to require testing."

Moore said that a large part of the commissioners' discussion surrounding the policy was about infringing on peoples' rights.

"It's one of those things we hate to deal with as a local government when we're being forced with mandates by the federal government or the state government," Moore commented.

Moore himself is vaccinated, but he said he feels that people have a right to choose what they want to do for themselves and their families.

"It's turned into a political issue rather than people doing what's right or wanting to take care of themselves," Moore explained. "People don't like to be told to do something ... if you ask somebody to do something or if you explain it [then maybe they'll do it], but if you force people to do things, they get their hackles up."

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The Supreme Court is currently considering the OSHA rules. If it declares them unconstitutional, the McKinley County policy may change. But for now, all municipal employees must either be vaccinated or undergo weekly testing and wear a face covering.

By Molly Ann Howell
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