

Police across US refuse COVID-19 vaccines

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Across the US, police are refusing to comply with COVID-19 vaccine mandates, with many quitting their jobs or filing lawsuits rather than receive a vaccine.

In August, Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot mandated that all city employees not fully vaccinated by October 15 had to undergo COVID-19 testing twice a week. Each unvaccinated employee is required to submit a test every three to four days, on their own time and at their own expense. The testing option is available only until the end of this year. After December 31, city employees must be fully vaccinated, unless they have received an approved medical or religious exemption.

The mayoral mandate sparked opposition among Chicago's police. Nearly one-third of Chicago's 13,000-member police department has so far refused to register their vaccination status, putting them on track for dismissal. City officials report that 21 police have been officially removed from active duty so far.

John Cantanzara, head of Chicago's largest police union, called for the union's approximately 11,000 members to defy the city's requirement to report vaccination status. After the city announced the vaccine mandate in August, Cantanzara compared it to Nazi Germany, telling the *Sun-Times*, "This ain't Nazi Germany. ... 'Step into the ... showers, the pills won't hurt you.'"

He said up to half of Chicago's police force would take unpaid leave rather than report their vaccine status.

"It is the city's clear attempt to force officers to 'Chicken Little, the sky is falling' into compliance," he said last week. "Do not fall for it. Hold the line."

A judge granted the city's request for a temporary order barring Cantanzara from making any public comments encouraging union members to resist the mandate. However, he has continued to post videos on the union's YouTube channel in defiance of the order. In a video posted online Tuesday, Cantanzara threatened to sue the Lightfoot administration if it tried

to enforce the mandate.

Senator Mike Braun, a Republican from Indiana, announced that officers in Illinois who lose their jobs due to vaccine mandates can look to Indiana for new positions, saying that the officers "deserve respect."

In a statement to Fox News, Braun said, "Our police do the hardest job in the world, and they deserve respect—not losing their pay or being fired for refusing to comply with a ridiculous vaccine mandate."

The conflict in Chicago reflects a broader trend across America. Police departments have faced resistance in their efforts to get police officers to comply with vaccine mandates, despite reports indicating that COVID-19 is now the leading cause of death of police in the country, according to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. According to the organization, 133 police officers died of COVID-related causes in 2021, higher than firearm and traffic-related deaths combined.

Some cities have released figures showing that police department employees tend to be vaccinated at lower rates than most other government workers, and at lower rates than the general public. In Los Angeles, where vaccines are required for city workers, more than 2,600 police department employees said they intended to seek a religious exemption.

Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva said he would not enforce the county's new vaccine mandate within his agency. He oversees the largest sheriff's department in the country, with approximately 18,000 employees. LA County set a deadline for county employees to be vaccinated by October 1. Villanueva said his employees are willing to be terminated rather than get vaccinated.

"I don't want to be in a position to lose 5, 10 percent of my workforce overnight on a vaccine mandate," the sheriff said.

Los Angeles County has recorded more than 26,000

COVID-related deaths, and health officials report an average of 14 deaths a day, despite slowing hospitalization rates.

The union representing New York City police officers vowed to sue the city government Wednesday, hours after Mayor Bill de Blasio announced a COVID-19 vaccine mandate for all New York City municipal employees.

Sheriff John Mina of Orange County Florida said he brought in a doctor to answer deputies' questions about vaccination and offered three days leave to those who got shots. However, the latest figures show about 45 percent of employees, who submitted their vaccination status, were still not vaccinated. The sheriff said he opposed mandates and said that his officers deal with "violent criminals all the time carrying guns, and I think they think that may be more of a threat."

In Milwaukee, city officials were pressured into an agreement with the city's police union earlier this month that requires union members to be vaccinated or wear masks while on duty, except when eating or drinking at a safe distance from others.

Firefighters and police officers from across New Jersey gathered in protest against vaccine mandates last week in Newark, the state's largest city. Multiple unions representing officers and firefighters have filed legal challenges to Newark Mayor Ras Baraka's vaccine requirement for city workers.

In Seattle, dozens of police officers and firefighters were fired Monday for refusing to comply with a vaccine mandate. On Tuesday, dozens of former cops and firefighters left their boots on the steps of Seattle's City Hall and posted videos on social media of them feeding the homeless. The Washington State Patrol also lost 127 employees following the mandate, including 67 troopers, six sergeants and one captain.



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