

## **Alert** | Immigration & Compliance



**May 2023**

### **Biden Administration to End COVID-19 Vaccination Requirement for International Travelers**

On May 1, 2023, the Biden administration **announced** that COVID-19 vaccination requirements for federal employees, federal contractors, and international air travelers will end at the end of the day on May 11, 2023. The federally issued COVID-19 public health emergency declaration will end the same day. Also on May 1, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) **announced** it would lift similar requirements that had applied to land ports of entry and ferry terminals.

The administration based this decision on the significant drop in the global COVID-19 death rate and the large number of Americans vaccinated against COVID-19. The World Health Organization announced that COVID-19-related deaths have dropped 90% globally. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), nearly 270 million Americans received at least one shot of the vaccine during the pandemic. Given the changed circumstances, the Biden administration has decided that “while vaccination remains one of the most important tools in advancing the health and safety of employees...these [vaccine requirements] are no longer necessary.” The requirement was initially put in place to slow the spread of the virus and to allow the U.S. health care system time to effectively manage increases in cases and hospitalizations. But starting May 12, international travelers will no longer need to provide proof they have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, making it easier for them to enter the United States.

Since November 2021 for air travelers and January 2022 for land-border travelers, virtually all non-immigrants – people who are not permanent residents (i.e., green card holders) or are not traveling to the

United States on an immigrant visa – were required to show proof they had been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 before travel to the United States. Unvaccinated foreigners with a valid visa may now come to the United States for travel, education, or work. This decision will also impact certain well-known individuals who have been unable to visit the United States due to the vaccination restriction. For example, Novak Djokovic, an unvaccinated 22-time Grand Slam tennis champion, had been unable to play in the United States due to the restriction, but may return to the U.S. Open in 2023. Lifting land-border restrictions had been particularly sought after by border communities along the United States/Canada border. The U.S. policies are now in line with Canada, which had already lifted its vaccine requirements in October 2022, and Mexico, which had never imposed any meaningful restrictions.

In addition, HHS and DHS announced they would start the process to end their vaccination requirements for Head Start educators and CMS-certified health care facilities.

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