

LIVE FROM CMA SHIPPING 2021

## Biden vaccination mandate piles pressure on US owners with federal contracts

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Boriana Farrar, CMA Shipping 2021



***Operators of US-flagged vessels contracted to the US government are struggling to ensure all their crew are vaccinated in time to comply with an executive order by US president Joe Biden, that all federal government employees should be jabbed by the end of the year.***

On Tuesday, the US Labor Department submitted to the White House the initial text of the Biden Administration's plan to require private-sector workers to be vaccinated against Covid-19 or get tested regularly.

Shipowners and ship managers, already reeling from the complications of attracting and maintaining crew during the pandemic, are facing a new crewing crisis with as much as 20% of

crews unvaccinated and reluctant to get the jab.

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Under the latest mandate, all vessel operators with ships contracted to the US government and suppliers to government contracted vessels will need to be vaccinated by the end of the year to be able to carry out activities on vessels chartered to the US government.

Speaking on the sideline of the CMA Shipping Expo & Conference as part of North America Shipping Week, Borianna Farrar, Vice President and Chief Legal Officer of Patriot Contract Services said the company was struggling to comply with the new guidelines with more than 10% of its crew members still unvaccinated.

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Operating 16 ships for the US federal government Patriot Contract Services currently manages seven Ready Reserve Force ships for the United States Maritime Administration; eight Watson class Large Medium Speed ro-ro vessels for the United States Navy, Military Sealift Command; and a shallow draft tanker for Schuyler Line Navigation Company.

In total, its fleet requires 455 crew, of which more than 50 had still not taken steps to vaccinate themselves against Covid-19.

“We as a company are working frantically to make sure that we meet this requirement,” said Farrar. “This might lead to a labor crisis because as we know some people are hesitant to go forward with vaccinations so let’s see how things develop. We’re doing everything we can to provide information to overcome this burden.

“It’s a big challenge for us to be ready in time for the new guidelines and we’re not alone. Anyone with a ship contracted to the US government will need to have 100% of their crew vaccinated by the end of the year or they will face difficulties operating their vessels.”

The mandate will apply to businesses with 100 or more employees and be implemented under a federal rule-making mechanism known as an emergency temporary standard. It is expected to affect roughly 80 million workers nationwide.

Other shipowners with Jones Act vessels chartered to the US government include Crowley, Maersk and APL.

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