



VACCINATIONS: WHO PAYS FOR REQUIRED VACCINES?

Many fire departments and emergency medical providers require at least some vaccinations as part of their employment. But who pays for the vaccinations? Employers? Employees? Insurance? Some combination of all three? This bulletin provides a guide for the agency's requirements for paying for required vaccinations.

The original vaccination required to be offered to employees is the Hepatitis B vaccination under the [OSHA Bloodborne Pathogen Standard](#). 1910.1030(f)(1)(ii)(A) states

The employer shall ensure that all medical evaluations and procedures including the hepatitis B vaccine and vaccination series and post-exposure evaluation and follow-up, including prophylaxis, are made available at no cost to the employee.

A [July 7, 1999 Letter of Interpretation](#) states, "Employees may incur no out-of-pocket expense for the vaccine and vaccination series."

[OSHA Compliance Directive](#) states:

The term "no cost to the employee" means, among other things, no "out of pocket" expense to the employee. The employer may not permit the employee to use their healthcare insurance to pay for the series unless the employer pays all of the cost of the health insurance and unless there is no cost to the employee in the form of deductibles, copayments, or other expenses. Even partial employee contribution to the insurance premium means the employee could be affected by a rise in the total premium caused by insurance company reaction to widespread hepatitis B vaccinations and is therefore unacceptable. Likewise, any use of a spouse or other family member's insurance plan to provide vaccination would not be considered "at no cost" to the employee.

The employer may not institute a program in which the employee pays the original cost of the vaccine and is reimbursed by the employer if they remain employed for a specified period of time.

An "amortization contract" which requires employees to reimburse the employer for the cost of the vaccination should they leave the employer prior to a specified period of time is similarly prohibited.

Inspectors have determined this language applies not only to the Hepatitis B vaccine but also to other required vaccinations. They are citing the General Duty Clause, which states, "*Employers must protect employees from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm, and OSHA has the legal authority under this provision to issue citations and fines even when there is no regulation that has been violated.*"

Vaccines that may be required for firefighters and EMTs include the hepatitis B vaccine; measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine; chickenpox vaccine, a booster for tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis; seasonal flu vaccine, COVID-19 vaccine; and tuberculosis testing.

New hire personnel may be required to bring their childhood vaccine records with them at the time of hire. These are reviewed to determine if the individual requires a protective vaccine. The department must offer the vaccine if not protected from a vaccine-preventable disease. The same applies to existing EMS personnel; they should obtain their vaccine records. The records are reviewed to identify each person's status.