

THE COVID-19 VACCINE GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS:

HOW TO IMPLEMENT A WORKPLACE VACCINATION PROGRAM

As COVID-19 vaccines become available to the public, the prospects of “normalcy” in the workplace have become an enticing prospect for employers. But many questions remain, from the legality of mandating vaccination to ensuring that employees who want the vaccine can receive it. Here’s what employers need to know about COVID-19 vaccines and how to run a safe, effective workplace vaccination program.

WHITE PAPER



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LEGAL MATTERS

CAN EMPLOYERS REQUIRE THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

Employers eager to vaccinate employees might wonder if they can mandate COVID-19 vaccinations as a standard for employment. Although the short answer is yes - federal law gives employers the right to mandate vaccination, provided they accommodate religious or disability-based exemptions - the practical answer is more complicated.

Since COVID-19 vaccines are currently approved for emergency use only, some legal experts have argued that employers cannot mandate the vaccine until it has gone through the full approval process. Mandating a vaccine at this stage might therefore expose employers to unnecessary liability. Companies with unionized employees face further challenges, since unions can successfully negotiate against required vaccination in contracts that employers must respect. These challenges explain why many employers have opted for voluntary vaccination programs, even in high-risk industries such as healthcare.

The following questions can help employers decide whether to pursue mandatory vaccination:

1

Can you reasonably accommodate employees with valid objections?

2

Will a mandatory vaccine impact employee morale?

3

Can you incentivize employees to voluntarily take the vaccine?

4

Have you considered potential legal challenges and/or liability in the rare case of an allergic reaction?

For most workplaces, voluntary programs are more practical and lead to more desirable outcomes. Below, we'll look at how to encourage voluntary participation.

ENCOURAGING VOLUNTARY VACCINATION

Persuading employees to voluntarily take the COVID-19 vaccine takes communication, education, and empathy. These tips can help to increase participation:

Listen to Concerns

Acknowledging, rather than dismissing, potential concerns can go a long way toward building trust and enthusiasm in the COVID-19 vaccine. Honest communication, patience, and empathy for the hesitation that employees might be feeling can help to alleviate fears and encourage voluntary participation.

Inform and Educate

New information about COVID-19 emerges constantly, from new variants to new vaccines. Providing ongoing information from trusted sources can help employees feel empowered and educated. Engaging a medical consultant to answer questions about the safety, efficacy and side effects of vaccination can help employees understand and trust the vaccination process.

Make It Easy

One of the most effective ways to promote vaccination is by making it available onsite. Developing a vaccination program that allows employees to get the shot without leaving work will help you achieve higher rates and stronger morale.

Lead by Example

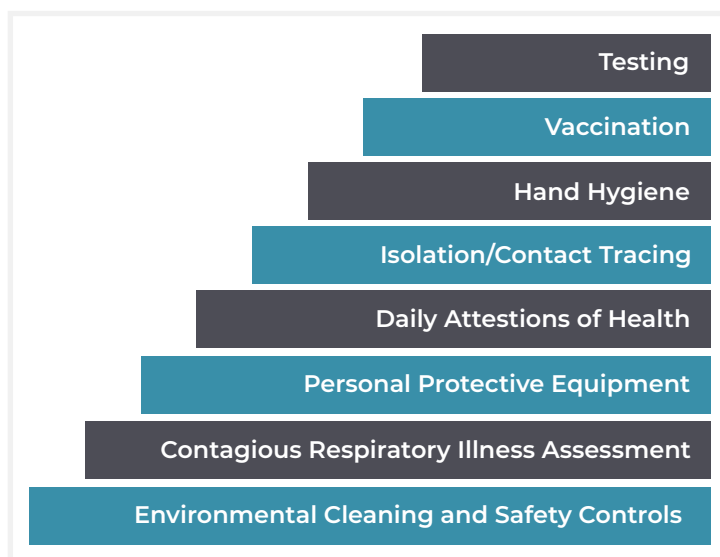
Encourage upper management to visibly take the vaccine. If CDC guidelines do not allow leadership to take the vaccine right away, celebrate senior employees who take the vaccine to help others feel more comfortable following suit.

Demonstrate the Impact

Helping employees understand concepts like herd immunity and the impact of every vaccinated person may motivate employees to do their part. By getting vaccinated, employees not only protect themselves, but also their colleagues, friends, and families.

Reassure of Your Layered Approach

While COVID-19 vaccination is an important step towards lowering your risk of contracting or spreading the disease, reassure employees of your commitment to a comprehensive layered approach for mitigating risk in the workplace. This would include environmental cleaning/safety controls, contagious respiratory illness assessments, personal protective equipment, daily attestations of health, isolation/contact tracing, hand hygiene, testing, and vaccination.



HOW THE COVID-19 VACCINE WORKS

Although dozens of potential COVID-19 vaccines have clinical trials, all work by triggering an immune response to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. This gives the body immunity without getting sick from the virus. Scientists use one of three methods to create a vaccine:

Messenger RNA (mRNA)

mRNA vaccines give the body instructions for how to make a key protein of SARS-CoV-2, which it uses to build immunity to the virus. Two mRNA vaccines, made by Moderna and Pfizer-Biotech, have been approved for emergency use in the US as of January 2021. Both proved more than 94% effective at preventing illness. Notably, mRNA vaccines require storage at sub-zero temperatures and work best when taken in two doses, about 4-6 weeks apart.



Protein Subunit

This approach uses harmless proteins from SARS-CoV-2 instead of the entire virus to elicit an immune response. When vaccinated, the immune system recognizes the proteins as foreign agents and begins making T-cells and antibodies. If a vaccinated person comes into contact with the actual virus, memory cells recognize and fight it.



Viral Vector

Viral vector vaccines use a weakened, live virus to trigger an immune response. COVID-19 vector viruses insert genetic material from SARS-CoV-2 into a similar virus, such as the common cold. Like the other vaccines, this gives cells instructions to make a protein unique to SARS-CoV-2, which prompts the body to create T-cells and antibodies. Johnson & Johnson has developed a one-dose vaccine, made with this approach.



Since all vaccines work by sparking the immune system into action, it takes about two weeks for the body to produce the cells it needs to protect against COVID-19. If a person comes into contact with the virus before immunity kicks in, it's possible to contract COVID-19. Masks and social distancing can help to prevent illness during this window.



COVID-19 VACCINE FAQs

Here are answers to some of the most common questions about COVID-19:

Q Can I catch COVID-19 from the vaccine?

A No. It is not possible to catch COVID-19 from the vaccine.

Q Why do I feel sick after getting a vaccine?

A Feeling feverish, sore, or sluggish after taking a vaccine is common. Although not everyone will experience these symptoms, they're a sign that the vaccine is triggering an immune response. They mean the body has recognized a foreign threat and is building the defenses needed to fend off the virus if you encounter it.

Q Why should I trust a vaccine that was developed so quickly?

A Many factors led to the availability of a safe, effective COVID-19 vaccine in less time than it takes to normally develop a new vaccine. For one, scientists had a big head start, thanks to studying the SARS and MERS viruses. For another, companies began making the vaccine much sooner than they typically do in anticipation of demand, reducing the time between approval and availability. These are just two factors that did not affect the safety of the vaccine but allowed it to reach the public more quickly.

Q How soon after vaccination will I be protected from COVID-19?

A It takes about two weeks after receiving the last needed dose for the vaccine to offer full protection. For mRNA vaccines, this means two weeks after the second dose.

Q Why can't everyone get the vaccine right away?

A Even though companies can roll out their own vaccination programs, they still need to follow guidelines outlined by state and local governments, many of which have chosen to follow CDC guidelines. The CDC currently recommends the following hierarchy:

Phase 1a: Healthcare personnel and long-term facility care residents.

Phase 1b: Frontline essential workers and persons aged ≥ 75 years.

Phase 1c: Persons aged 65–74 years, persons aged 16–64 years with high-risk medical conditions, and essential workers not recommended for vaccination in Phase 1b.

Phase 2: All persons aged ≥ 16 years not previously recommended for vaccination.

Q Why do I have to continue wearing a mask after I get the vaccine?

A The COVID-19 vaccine is proven to protect against illness, but we need more testing to confirm whether the vaccine protects against transmission to other people. Wearing a mask and continuing to practice social distancing helps to keep vulnerable colleagues, neighbors, and others from getting sick.

Q Should any groups not get the COVID-19 vaccine?

A The COVID-19 vaccine is currently not approved for pregnant women, the severely immunocompromised, such as those undergoing chemotherapy, or individuals who have a history of severe allergic reactions.

IMPLEMENTING **WORKPLACE VACCINATION**

Workplace vaccination programs are one of the most effective ways to increase participation. One recent study of Flu vaccination showed that participation more than tripled when the shot was offered at the workplace.¹ And while COVID-19 introduces challenges that companies don't face with the Flu, onsite vaccination is still advantageous. For example, it provides a chance for hesitant employees to learn more about the vaccine, and it increases the likelihood of employees receiving their second dose of mRNA vaccines.

Here are tips to implement a successful workplace vaccination program:

Hire a Professional

Working with a third party medical provider will help to ensure that you properly follow CDC guidelines, meet the proper conditions for vaccine storage, and take appropriate measures for social distancing before and after vaccination. A medical professional can help you optimize your space and resources to vaccinate as many employees as possible, as quickly as possible.

Be Flexible

As new vaccines become approved and more information becomes available, some hesitant employees may feel more comfortable with vaccination. Giving employees multiple opportunities to take the vaccine can help to increase participation. Likewise, allowing employees to schedule vaccination during work hours without penalty will boost overall numbers.

Continue Comprehensive Layered Approach

Continued use of a comprehensive layered approach is vital to combating COVID-19 in the workplace, both before and after vaccination. Remind employees that their bodies need time to build immunity to the virus that causes COVID-19, and until more information becomes available, employees should also assume they can still transmit the virus to others.





TRACKING VACCINATION



Digitally tracking participation of employees is a final, important component of an effective workplace vaccination program. Knowing which employees have been vaccinated allows managers to better protect vulnerable workers, ensure follow-up appointments for two-dose vaccines, and appropriately schedule public-facing employees.

Axiom's **CheckIn2Work** app will allow employers to easily track the vaccination status of employees alongside self-reported symptoms of COVID-19, and COVID-19 test results. This gives employers a complete snapshot of all COVID-related activity in a single app.

Contact Axiom to learn more about how to implement a successful workplace vaccination and education program.

(281) 465-7100 | axiomllc.com

References

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