

# How to encourage employees to get vaccinated against COVID-19



Employees must be vaccinated before work can begin to return to normal. There's little debate about that. However, with the vaccine potentially reaching the general population sometime this summer, the consensus on how we get there is less definitive.

Legally, employers can require vaccinations as long as they provide exemptions. These exemptions include things like religious objections, disabilities, and other medical reasons. Still, legal does not necessarily mean recommended and many employers may not wish to mandate vaccinations for employees. After all, employers who mandate vaccinations must be prepared to terminate employees who refuse.

So how do you get as many employees vaccinated as possible without mandating the vaccine?

There's no one size fits all approach for every employer. Each business will have to craft a plan that works best for them. However, there are some strategies and recommendations that remain true across all businesses, because a business is made up of people, after all, and people are pretty similar no matter where they are.

## Employee Information Campaigns

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 vaccine is yet another casualty of continued mis-and-disinformation. On top of that, despite the vaccine's relative safety, many Americans have understandable concerns around its expedited timeline.

Safety concerns are the top reason Americans say they won't get the COVID-19 vaccine. The good news, however? Approximately half of Americans who don't plan to be vaccinated said they may change their mind as more information becomes available. That means the best way to encourage vaccinations is with education.

## Hold a Q&A session

Consider holding a meeting (either virtually or socially distanced) to present key information about the vaccine and vaccine safety. Even better, if you're able, invite a qualified medical professional to speak with employees and answer any questions.

It's important not to speculate, however. Stick to the facts that are available, and if you don't have an answer to a question, promise to follow up later.

Finally, be prepared to discuss your organization's policies and procedures around COVID safety and vaccinations. Will employees who choose not to be vaccinated work different schedules? Can employees take time from work to get their vaccines? The more information you have to share with employees, the more trust you'll be able to build.

## Distribute information effectively

Holding a meeting isn't the only tactic you can employ. Providing informational materials to employees can be an effective strategy — if you do so effectively. It's not enough to just send an email, which is likely to get lost in inboxes, or put a flier in the breakroom that many employees won't see.

A multi-email campaign may work for some. For larger organizations, you could consider pushing employees to an intranet page with everything they need to know. If your employees are less tech-savvy, you may want to put up posters, provide handouts, and take a few moments in meetings to point employees to a central source of information.

## What information do employees need to know?

Providing general information is good, but it's even better to get to the point. Acknowledging and quickly addressing concerns employees have is more effective than providing a long list of literature for them to read. So let's look at a few of the key concerns circulating among COVID vaccine skeptics that you may wish to address.

### **Yes, the timeline was expedited. No, that doesn't mean shortcuts were taken.**

While the speed with which the COVID vaccine was developed was a first, so were the amount of coordination and resources dedicated to it. Vast amounts of government money were dedicated to research, giving pharmaceutical companies support and security to dedicate to vaccine research. Beyond that, scientists and researchers across the globe changed gears and reallocated resources to aid in vaccine development.

Additionally, the widespread nature of the COVID-19 pandemic allowed researchers to complete clinical trials in record times. Once a vaccine is developed, it must be tested for safety and then efficacy. For a virus with low prevalence, it could take years to collect research on its efficacy. After all, you have to vaccinate people, then monitor to see how many of them contract the virus. However, because of the wide prevalence of COVID-19 in the United States and the large sample sizes used in these clinical trials, it was easy to collect this data more quickly and efficiently than normal.

### **Yes, there could be temporary side effects. No, you shouldn't worry about them.**

Potential side effects are a reality for every vaccine and medication. Serious side effects, however, are very uncommon. The Moderna vaccine had a clinical trial of 30,000 people. The Pfizer vaccine had over 40,000 participants. With these large sample sizes, even very rare reactions are highly likely to show up in clinical trials. The most common severe side effect from the Pfizer vaccine, for example, was headache and fatigue. These symptoms are not uncommon from what one might experience after the more familiar flu vaccine.

**Yes, you might not feel well after. No, it won't make you sick.**

Some people may feel unwell for a short time after being vaccinated. This is because your body is responding to the vaccine like it would a cold or infection. The vaccine causes cells in your body to create a harmless piece of the "spike protein" found on the surface of the COVID-19 virus. Your immune system then responds, destroying these cells and learning how to recognize the spike protein. This allows it to respond quickly should the COVID-19 virus enter your body in the future. No live virus enters your body when vaccinated and you cannot contract COVID-19 from receiving it.

**Yes, herd immunity can protect unvaccinated people. No, you shouldn't forgo getting vaccinated.**

Herd immunity happens when a certain percentage of the population is vaccinated against a virus (the threshold for COVID-19 is presumed to be between 70-90%). With enough of the population vaccinated, the virus is not able to spread effectively through the population.

This decreases the likelihood of an unvaccinated person getting sick because most people around them are unlikely to catch the virus. However, if too many Americans refuse vaccinations, then the virus will continue to circulate more easily.

Additionally, while it is likely to reduce your ability to transmit the virus, it is currently unclear if getting vaccinated fully prevents you from spreading COVID-19. This means while a vaccinated person is unlikely to get sick, it may be possible for a vaccinated person to carry the COVID-19 virus and spread it to an unvaccinated coworker.

## **Additional ways to encourage employees to get vaccinated**

Ensuring employees have reliable information is the first step, but if you want to get a large portion of your workforce vaccinated, you may need to do more than that.

### **Make it easy for employees to get vaccinated**

Allow employees to get vaccinated during working hours. If it doesn't take time out of their normal day, they're more likely to do it. Additionally, for hourly employees, let this be paid time. An employee may be hesitant to lose an hour or 2 of pay to go get vaccinated. *but if you're willing to cover the cost of that time, then their reasons for not doing so are limited.*

Even better, arrange transportation for employees to bring them to their vaccination appointments. That could be a significant factor for employees, especially those who may lack reliable transportation.

It may not be possible for all employees to get vaccinated during work hours, depending on the position. However, you should work with employees and adjust their schedules where possible to leave time for them to get vaccinated.

### **Incentivize it for employees**

You may not wish to force employees to get the vaccine, and punishing those who don't opens you up to legal liabilities. You can, however, create incentives for employees to get vaccinated. This isn't a new concept. Wellness programs often give employees lower premiums or monetary incentives for partaking in health and wellness activities, getting an annual check-up, quitting smoking, and much more.

Creating incentives for employees who get the vaccine can help encourage those who may be lukewarm about the idea. Some examples of incentives include extra time off, participation in an event or lunch, a gift card, or another monetary bonus. With that in mind, however, there are a few things to consider.

First, determine how you will address those who do not wish to be vaccinated for religious or medical reasons. You don't want to appear like you're punishing these individuals by exempting them from participating. While it's not likely this would spawn be a significant legal issue, it may be best to simply provide this incentive to those who claim an exemption or provide them with an alternative target to qualify them for the incentive.

Additionally, depending on the incentive you choose, don't forget that it may be considered taxable income. Monetary incentives or monetary equivalents will most likely be considered taxable income, whereas participation in a lunch or a free half-day off may not be.

### **Lead by example**

If you're encouraging employees to get vaccinated, your leadership should also plan to get vaccinated. Otherwise, it undermines the credibility of your push. Encourage leaders and fellow coworkers to talk about their vaccinations. The more one's leaders and peers engage and normalize the vaccination, the more likely a skeptical employee may be to reconsider their original stance.

### **Make sure employees understand the cost of not getting vaccinated, if there is one**

You should not actively punish an employee for refusing to get vaccinated, however, make sure employees know if there are any consequences of not doing so. For example, if an employee is in a public-facing job — will they be required to wear a mask while a vaccinated coworker does not? If any aspects of an employee's job may change based on their choice to get the vaccine or not, those should be made clear.

**Additional Resource:** Learn more about the [legal considerations around employee vaccinations](#).