

Three ways employers can increase vaccination rates among employees.

Options for Employers Wanting to Increase Vaccination Rates

(1) Inform Your Employees

In the age of social media, credible informational efforts are critically important. While many people are inundated with misinformation concerning the vaccine through social media, many others simply do not pay attention to news and therefore are not knowledgeable about some very basic information (many believe they have to pay for the vaccine, even though a simple Google search would show it is free).

Employers can help their employees discern COVID-19-related information by emphasizing that although the vaccine is not 100% effective at preventing infection or transmission of COVID-19, it is still the best defense against serious illness, hospitalization, and death. According to the CDC, less than .004% of those fully vaccinated have been hospitalized with COVID-19, and only .0001% have died. By addressing specific questions, concerns, or misconceptions among vaccination skeptics in your workforce, reliable information can be highly effective in communicating positive messages.

Information may be rolled out in a number of effective ways:

- HR or company leadership may present informal question-and-answer sessions;
- Credible and experienced healthcare professionals may be invited to the workplace for interactive lunch-and-learn series;
- Providing access to videos and other forms of media available from the CDC, FDA, or other credible state resources about the vaccines; and
- Encouraging questions before Q&A sessions and answering them with confidentiality as to their source.

Make sure you offer these opportunities in every language necessary to get your point across, and provide your workers with take-home materials so they can consider the matter at their own pace and even discuss with their families. And to make sure you get as many people in attendance as possible (and to comply with state and federal wage and hour laws), you should pay your employees for the time they spend at your education sessions.

(2) Offer Incentives

Employers may also offer incentives to employees who provide valid vaccination cards. Common incentives include cash, gifts, or paid time off. Employers may look to EEOC guidance to ensure they do not violate anti-discrimination laws:

- If an employee voluntarily provides documentation confirming they have been vaccinated and got the shot on their own from a pharmacy, public health department, or other healthcare provider, employers may offer any incentive without limitations

- If an employer organization administers the vaccine, it may still offer incentives so long as they are not so substantial in value as to be considered coercive.

If an employer offers the vaccine to its employees on its premises, it should expressly state to employees that the administrator of the vaccine is not acting on behalf of the employer or sharing employee information. Employers must avoid entanglements with a vaccine provider if it is retained to provide the vaccine to its employees. Strict patient confidentiality must be respected.

(3) Mandate the Vaccine

With the FDA approval of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine came greater employer pressure on employees to become vaccinated as a condition of their employment. Additionally, employers may find confidence in requiring the vaccine where over 376 million Americans have been vaccinated with only very rare side effects causing anything more than minor complications.

Employers requiring the vaccination of their employees must consider these helpful tips first:

- Determine how much time employees must be given to become vaccinated and timelines for employees who wish to request a reasonable accommodation;
- Consider compensating employees for the time spent traveling to, receiving, and time missed from work due to side effects of the vaccine;
- Develop a reasonable accommodation policy to address legitimate religious and medical disability issues and be prepared to engage with employees about reasonable accommodations;
- Consider how employees, consumers, and other stakeholders are likely to respond to the mandate and devise a plan for managing forms of anxiety and or resistance;
- Assign to designated employee's duties pertaining to the vaccination process, including accommodations, well in advance of implementation of the policy.