FAQs about COVID-19 Vaccination in the Workplace: For Employers

1 **What are the benefits of having a workplace COVID-19 vaccination program?**

Making COVID-19 vaccination part of your workplace wellness program offers many benefits to you and your employees. To keep your workplace healthy, consider offering free, on-site COVID-19 vaccination at your business locations.

Potential benefits to employers:
- Keep the workforce healthy by preventing employees from getting COVID-19
- Reduce absences due to illness
- Reduce time missed from work to get vaccinated
- Improve productivity
- Improve morale

Potential benefits to employees:
- Prevent COVID-19 illness
- Reduce absences and doctor visits due to illness
- Offers convenience
- Improve morale

If your business can't offer COVID-19 vaccinations on site, or if your state or jurisdiction has determined that your business is not a suitable location at this time, encourage employees to seek COVID-19 vaccination in their community and provide them with information about where they can get the vaccine.

2 **How does my workplace implement a COVID-19 vaccination program?**

Employers considering implementing a workplace COVID-19 vaccination program should contact the health department in their jurisdiction (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/open-america/hd-search/index.html) for guidance. The planning process for hosting a workplace COVID-19 vaccination program should include input from management, human resources, employees, and labor representatives, as appropriate. Important preliminary steps include obtaining senior management support,

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identifying a vaccine coordinator, and enlisting expertise from local public health authorities, occupational health providers, and pharmacies. Additional considerations for hosting a vaccination clinic can be found in CDC's Guidance for Planning Vaccination Clinics Held at Satellite, Temporary, or Off-Site Locations (https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/admin/mass-clinic-activities/index.html) and Resources for Hosting a Vaccination Clinic (https://www.cdc.gov/flu/business/hosting-vaccination-clinic.htm). COVID-19 vaccination providers can also review Interim Considerations: Preparing for the Potential Management of Anaphylaxis After COVID-19 Vaccination (https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/clinical-considerations/managing-anaphylaxis.html).

3 **Will use of COVID-19 vaccines be mandated under Emergency Use Authorizations (EUAs)?**

No, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not mandate vaccination. However, whether a state, local government, or employer, for example, may require or mandate COVID-19 vaccination is a matter of state or other applicable law.

4 **Can I require my employees to get the COVID-19 vaccine regardless of their medical conditions or religious beliefs?**

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) provides guidance on mandatory vaccination against H1N1 influenza. The EEOC guidance may be applicable to COVID-19 vaccination, which became available in December 2020.

For employers covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), "...an employee may be entitled to an exemption based on an ADA disability that prevents him from taking the influenza vaccine."

For employers covered under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, "once an employer receives notice that an employee's sincerely held religious belief, practice, or observance prevents him from taking the influenza vaccine, the employer must provide a reasonable accommodation unless it would pose an undue hardship."

"Generally, ADA-covered employers should consider simply encouraging employees to get the influenza vaccine rather than requiring them to take it."

See question 13 for more information from the EEOC, available at https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/pandemic-preparedness-workplace-and-americans-disabilities-act

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5 **What kind of exemptions typically accompany employee vaccination programs?**

Two types of exemptions can be implemented: medical and religious exemptions. Some people may be at risk for an adverse reaction because of an allergy to one of the vaccine components or a medical condition. This is referred to as a medical exemption. Some people may decline vaccination because of a religious belief. This is referred to as a religious exemption. Employers offering vaccination to workers should keep a record of the offer to vaccinate and the employee's decision to accept or decline vaccination (https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/pandemic-preparedness-workplace-and-americans-disabilities-act).

6 **Can I require people to get vaccinated as a condition of work? Can I require proof if someone claims to have been vaccinated?**

Whether an employer may require or mandate COVID-19 vaccination is a matter of state or other applicable law. If an employer requires employees to provide proof that they have received a COVID-19 vaccination from a pharmacy or their own healthcare provider, the employer cannot mandate that the employee provide any medical information as part of the proof.

7 **How can I encourage my employees to get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Consider hosting a vaccination clinic at your workplace, and contact the health department in your jurisdiction for guidance. Offer the vaccination at no charge and during work hours. If hosting a vaccination clinic at your workplace is not possible, consider other steps to encourage vaccination, listed below:

- Be flexible in your human resources policies. Establish policies that allow employees to take paid leave to seek COVID-19 vaccination in the community. Support transportation to off-site vaccination clinics.

- Use promotional posters/flyers to advertise locations offering COVID-19 vaccination in the community. Display posters about COVID-19 vaccination in break rooms, cafeterias, and other high-traffic areas.

- Post articles in company communications (e.g., newsletters, intranet, emails, portals) about the importance of COVID-19 vaccination and where to get the vaccine in the community.

8 **How can employers reassure employees that the COVID-19 vaccine is safe, even though it is new?**

COVID-19 vaccines are being held to the same safety standards as all other vaccines. The federal government has been working since the pandemic began to make COVID-19 vaccines available as soon as possible while ensuring they are safe and effective through the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) authority. COVID-19 vaccines were tested in large studies that included thousands of adults of varying ages, racial and ethnic groups, and health status. The study results showed that the vaccines met rigorous safety criteria and provided protection from COVID-19 in the study populations.

The most common side effects were pain at the injection site and symptoms like fever and chills. These side effects tended to be mild to moderate and went away quickly on their own. Many had few or no severe side effects. In addition, adults over 55 had fewer and milder side effects than younger people. Learn more about what steps are taken to ensure the safety of COVID-19 vaccines (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety.html).

9 **What information should employees get before vaccination?**

COVID-19 vaccines will initially be available through the U.S. COVID-19 Vaccination Program. The law requires that vaccination providers participating in the program provide vaccine recipients with certain information, including an EUA Fact Sheet for Recipients (https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/eua/index.html) about the vaccine they are receiving and possible side effects, as well as a vaccination record card with the name and manufacturer of the vaccine they received, where they received it, and when they need to return for a second dose of vaccine if required. You can also hand out this flyer (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/expect.html) from CDC.

10 **After employees have been vaccinated, can they stop practicing other preventive measures such as social distancing and wearing masks?**

No. CDC recommends that people continue to take these and other preventive measures after they are vaccinated. Even if employees have received the COVID-19 vaccine, it will be important for them to continue other preventive measures such as wearing a mask, staying 6 feet away from others, avoiding crowds, washing hands often, and cleaning high-touch surfaces frequently. It takes time for your body to build protection after any vaccination, and the COVID-19 vaccine may not protect you until a week or two after your second shot (dose). Together, getting vaccinated for COVID-19 and following CDC's recommendations for how to protect yourself and others (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html) will offer the best protection from getting and spreading COVID-19.

11 If we vaccinate our employees, can we return to or reopen the workplace?

It is important to conduct a thorough assessment of the workplace to identify potential workplace hazards related to COVID-19. Widespread vaccination of employees can be one consideration for restarting operations and returning to the workplace. Other considerations for returning to the workplace (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html) include:

1. The necessity for employees to physically return to the workplace and whether telework options can be continued

2. Transmission of SARS CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in the community (how many infections there are and how fast it's spreading)

3. The ability of employees to practice social distancing and other prevention measures, like wearing masks, when in the workplace

4. Local or state mandates for business closure restrictions

12 What should we tell employees to do if they develop a fever after getting vaccinated?

Employees who experience a fever after vaccination should, ideally, stay home from work pending further evaluation, including consideration for COVID-19 testing. CDC has released guidance (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/post-vaccine-considerations-healthcare-personnel.html), which includes suggested approaches to evaluating and managing post-vaccination symptoms, including fever.

13 What should I do if people call in sick with side effects?

In most cases, discomfort after vaccination from fever or pain at the injection site is normal and lasts only a day or 2. You should encourage the employee to stay home and contact their doctor or healthcare provider if:

- The redness or tenderness where they got the shot increases after 24 hours

- Their side effects are worrying them or do not seem to be going away after a few days

- Learn about how to report a problem or bad reaction (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html#Safety) after getting a COVID-19 vaccine.

14   Should we tell employees to report vaccine side effects?

CDC and FDA encourage the public to report possible side effects (called "adverse events") to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (https://vaers.hhs.gov/reportevent.html). Employers can also encourage employees to enroll in a new smartphone-based tool called "v-safe" (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/vsafe.html). CDC is implementing v-safe to check in on people's health after they receive a COVID-19 vaccine. When employees receive a vaccine, they should also receive a v-safe information sheet telling them how to enroll in v-safe. If they enroll, they will receive regular text messages directing them to surveys where they can report any problems or adverse reactions (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html#Safety) after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine. CDC also provides recommendations (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/allergic-reaction.html) for people who have had allergic reactions to other vaccines and for those with other types of allergies.

15   Should I continue to offer influenza vaccination (https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/vaccinations.htm) to my employees?

Yes. It is important that everyone 6 months and older be vaccinated to protect themselves from flu every fall and winter. While getting a flu vaccine will not protect against COVID-19, it can prevent people from becoming sick with flu and needing medical care. Flu is another serious respiratory illness that can cause missed work, hospitalization, and, in some cases, even death. The combination of flu and COVID-19 could overwhelm healthcare settings. However, people should not get the flu shot within 14 days (https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/clinical-considerations.html#Coadministration) of getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

16   Should I include contractors and temporary employees in my COVID-19 vaccination plan?

For workers employed by contract firms or temporary help agencies, the staffing agency and the host employer are joint employers and, therefore, both are responsible for providing and maintaining a safe work environment. The extent of the responsibilities the staffing agency and the host employer have will vary, depending on the workplace conditions, and should be described in their contract (Protecting Temporary Workers – https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2014-139/pdfs/2014-139.pdf?id=10.26616/NIOSHPUB2014139).

If you plan to offer vaccination at your workplace, consider providing vaccination to all people working at the workplace, regardless of their status as a contract or temporary employee. What is most important is to encourage everyone at the work site to be vaccinated, no matter what their work arrangement is. If you do not plan to or are unable to offer work site vaccination, consider providing information to those at the workplace about how to explore options for vaccination in the community.

17 **Should I stagger vaccination schedules for employees to avoid worker shortages due to vaccine side effects?**

Data from COVID-19 vaccine trials indicate that most side effects are mild. Most occur within the first 3 days of vaccination (the day of vaccination and the following 2 days, with most occurring the day after vaccination), resolve within 1–2 days, and are more frequent and severe following the second dose. At this time, we do not know how common these symptoms may be among employees. Nonetheless, we expect that most employees who experience symptoms following vaccination will not need to miss work. Please see CDC guidance (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/post-vaccine-considerations-healthcare-personnel.html) for further information.

However, some employees who get vaccinated may have side effects, like fever, and might need to miss work temporarily. CDC understands concerns about potential workforce shortages resulting from vaccine side effects. Workplaces may consider staggering schedules for employees who receive vaccination so that not all employees are vaccinated on the same day.

In addition, staggering may be more important for the second dose, after which side effects seem more frequent. To help ensure continuity of operations, facilities may consider staggering vaccination for employees in the same job category or who work in the same area of a facility. Staggering vaccination for employees may cause delays in vaccinating your staff, and the decision to stagger vaccination will need to be weighed against potential inconveniences that might reduce vaccine acceptance. Facilities should evaluate their specific situation when determining their best approach. Facilities that choose to stagger vaccine administration should also ensure all employees receive 2 doses as recommended.

18 **What if an employee has already had COVID-19? Should they still get vaccinated?**

Yes. Both the virus that causes COVID-19 and the vaccine are new. We don't yet know how long protection lasts for those who get infected or those who are vaccinated. COVID-19 vaccination should be offered to workers regardless of whether they already had COVID-19. Workers should not be required to have an antibody test before or after they are vaccinated. Learn more about getting vaccinated (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html#Getting) if someone has already had COVID-19.