

HR Insights

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Workplace COVID-19 Vaccination Programs

While decisions regarding vaccine distribution vary by state and local governments, eligibility will soon expand to most adults in the United States. This means it's time for employers to prepare to put plans into action. For some organizations, these plans may include a workplace vaccination program.

This HR Insights article provides an overview of guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for workplace vaccination programs, including [guidance](#) for on-site and off-site vaccinations, and general considerations for employers.

On-site Vaccination Programs

Some workplaces may be eligible to offer a COVID-19 vaccination program on-site. These programs provide free vaccines on-site, which generally are distributed through existing occupational health clinics, employer-run temporary vaccination clinics or mobile vaccination clinics brought to the workplace.

These programs can ease the process for employees to receive a COVID-19 vaccine by removing potential barriers. A vaccinated workforce can create benefits for workplaces, such as improved employee health, and reduced illnesses and absences. These benefits can directly impact employees—as well as employers, and the overall health and morale of a workplace.

Considering an On-site Program

Employers should consider an on-site workplace vaccination program if they have:

- A large number of workers on-site with predictable schedules
- An ability to enroll with their jurisdiction's immunization program as a [vaccination provider](#), including appropriately [training](#) staff or engaging with an enrolled vaccine provider
- A location with enough space to stand up a vaccination clinic while maintaining social distancing through the entire process, from screening to post-vaccination observation. See [CDC guidance for temporary vaccination clinics](#) for more detail.

Planning An On-site Vaccination Program

For employers considering implementing a workplace COVID-19 vaccination program, the planning process should include input from management, HR and employees. When planning, employers should:

- Contact the [health department in their jurisdiction](#) for guidance and to learn more about eligibility.
- Consider partnering with a community vaccination provider. These providers typically deliver worksite flu vaccination services and are expanding to provide COVID-19 vaccination. They generally have trained nursing staff available in all jurisdictions, can bill insurance for administration fees, and can report vaccine administration data to immunization registries.
- Ensure vaccination providers are prepared to monitor for and manage [potential anaphylaxis after vaccination](#).
- Ensure workplace vaccination clinics offer vaccination at no charge and during work hours.
- Provide easy access to vaccination for all people working at the workplace, regardless of their status as a contractor or temporary employee.

- Offer more than one opportunity for vaccination. Mobile clinics can return to a worksite multiple times on a rotating schedule.
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Off-site Vaccinations

Not all workplaces will be eligible to offer an on-site workplace vaccination program, and in some cases, it simply may not be feasible or the best option. Regardless, employers can play a key role in helping employees get vaccinated in their communities.

Considering Off-site Vaccinations

Employers should consider off-site vaccination if they:

- Are a small- or mid-sized organization that does not have the resources to host a vaccination clinic
- Have mobile worker populations that frequently move from one job site to the next
- Have workers with highly variable schedules
- Have a majority of workers who would prefer vaccination in a community clinic rather than an employer-run clinic

Planning Off-site Vaccinations

Employers can consider off-site options in their community. These include:

- Mobile or temporary vaccination clinics set up at community locations (closed or open to the public)
- Pharmacies enrolled in the [Federal Retail Pharmacy Program](#)
- Hospitals and healthcare provider offices
- Federally qualified health centers and other community clinics

Employers not hosting a vaccination clinic at their workplace can consider other steps to encourage vaccination:

- Allow employees to get vaccinated during work hours or take paid leave to get vaccinated at a community site.
 - Support transportation to off-site vaccination clinics, such as by paying fares for taxis or ride-sharing services, ensuring employees can maintain social distancing. Check with your health department(s) about potential assistance, such as a mobile clinic or transportation support.
 - Some jurisdictions have screening requirements to ensure that only those who are eligible are vaccinated. Be sure to let employees know what they will need to bring with them to be vaccinated (e.g., employee ID badge or nametag, or a voucher).
 - Post articles in company communications (e.g., newsletters, intranet, emails and portals) about the importance of COVID-19 vaccination, as well as how and where to get the vaccine in the community.
 - Educate and help workers who are eligible for vaccination make their appointments through available channels.
 - Make sure employees know the COVID-19 vaccine is provided free of charge. They should not be asked to pay any fee, including a vaccine administration fee, and cannot be denied a vaccine if they do not have insurance coverage. Providers may bill their insurance plan or program for the administration fee if they have insurance.
 - Identify other potential barriers unique to your workforce and implement policies and practices to address them.
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Workplace Vaccination Program Considerations

Whether offering an on-site vaccination program or encouraging employees to become vaccinated in the community, there are some general considerations for employers, listed below.

Building Confidence in COVID-19 Vaccines

Employers can play a key role in building employees' confidence about COVID-19 vaccines. [Vaccine confidence](#) is the trust that employees, their families and providers have in:

- Recommended vaccines

- Providers who administer vaccines
- Processes and policies that lead to vaccine development, licensure or authorization, manufacturing and recommendations for use

Employers can build vaccine confidence by making confidence visible in the workplace. Consider these steps:

- Encourage your leaders to be vaccine champions. These leaders should reflect the diversity of the workforce. Invite them to share with staff their personal reasons for getting vaccinated and remind staff why it's important to be vaccinated.
- Communicate transparently to all workers about vaccination.
- Create a communication plan. Share key messages with staff through breakroom posters, emails and other channels. Emphasize the benefits of protecting themselves, their families, co-workers and community. This [fact sheet](#) is available in numerous languages.
- Provide regular updates on topics like the [benefits](#), [safety](#), [side effects](#) and [effectiveness of vaccination](#), and clearly communicate what is not known.

Employers should also be prepared to allow time for vaccine confidence to grow. Employees who are hesitant at first may become more confident after seeing co-workers get vaccinated.

Scheduling Employee Vaccinations

Some employees may experience side effects, which are normal signs that their body is building protection. These side effects may affect their ability to do daily activities, but they should go away in a few days. The CDC encourages employers to provide flexible leave policies for those who may have post-vaccination symptoms. To accommodate, employers may choose to offer flexible, nonpunitive sick leave options (e.g., paid sick leave) for employees with signs and symptoms after vaccination too.

Employers can consider staggering employee vaccination to avoid worker shortages due to vaccine side effects. Notably, for employees who receive a two-dose vaccine, staggering may be more important for the second dose, after which side effects are more frequent. To help ensure continuity of operations, employers 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 staff, and the decision to stagger vaccination will need to be weighed against potential inconveniences that might reduce vaccine acceptance. Employers that choose to stagger vaccine administration should also ensure all employees receive the recommended number of doses.

Vaccine Exemptions

Employers that choose to offer a vaccine program should be prepared to respond to employees with exemptions:

- Medical 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.
- Religious exemptions—Some people may decline vaccination because of a religious belief. This is referred to as a religious exemption.

Conclusion

Employers should consider whether vaccination programs fit into their return-to-work and any workplace vaccination plans. After employees are fully vaccinated, they may be able to start doing some things they had stopped doing because of the pandemic. However, even after employees receive a COVID-19 vaccine, they may still need to continue to take steps to protect themselves and others in work settings.

For more information about eligibility to host a workplace vaccination program, check with your local health officials. Employers can also review CDC resources with up-to-date [information](#) regarding workplace vaccination programs. Contact us today for more return-to-work resources.

