

HR Insights

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Reactions to Biden's COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate

President Joe Biden's administration is blazing ahead with its COVID-19 vaccination efforts. Federal workers and nursing home staff were recently ordered to get vaccinated as a condition of employment. Now, a similar mandate is being imposed on private employers with 100 or more employees.

That's right—applicable employers will soon need to require COVID-19 vaccinations among employees or allow them to show proof of a negative test each week.

The specifics of the mandate—which are being drafted by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)—have yet to be released. This leaves employers in limbo for now, where they'll have to prepare their workforces without knowing the full scope of what's expected of them.

Until OSHA releases its rule, employers are left to do their best in preparing for the upcoming mandate. This article offers a glance at how employers across the country are reacting to this developing situation.

The Eager

Some employers are welcoming this latest move from the White House. With a fully approved COVID-19 vaccine and federal vaccination mandates in place, employers now have some cover to make policy changes.

Many large companies were planning or already implemented their own vaccine mandates ahead of

the Biden administration's announcement. Such companies include Tyson Foods, Google, United Airlines, Chevron and Disney.

Now that the government is instituting stricter vaccine measures, these employers may feel they don't have to worry as much about potential employee backlash. In other words, employers eager to get vaccinated workers can point out that the government is forcing their hands when it comes to vaccines.

Employers in this camp may adhere to more strict vaccination policies and might not necessarily allow workers to submit negative COVID-19 tests as an alternative (which may be within their authority). For instance, Delta Air Lines is currently charging unvaccinated workers a monthly surcharge to receive health benefits.

While this isn't the only example of an aggressive vaccination policy, it does illustrate how eager some employers are to get vaccinated workforces.

The Cautious

Some employers are taking a wait-and-see approach to the upcoming vaccine mandate. This includes making statements that laud the spirit of the requirement, yet don't explain any definitive action steps the companies will be taking. For instance, the sentiment expressed among these



employers have largely been: “We are reviewing our policies and are awaiting more details.”

And this position isn't very surprising, considering how little is known about the upcoming mandate. In fact, it's perhaps the most common position for employers who are still struggling to understand the scope of their responsibilities. Put another way, these employers are ready to fulfill their compliance obligations, but cannot quite determine what that action will look like in practice.

The Hesitant

Some employers are skeptical of the upcoming vaccine mandate for a number of reasons. These organizations are concerned about alienating their workers in a tight labor market, regardless of the company's position on vaccines. Even if the company wants vaccinated workers, the fear is that employees will quit if forced between their jobs and vaccination, which may leave countless positions left unfilled and tank productivity.

This is a legitimate concern, particularly in geographical areas with low vaccination rates and entrenched viewpoints that oppose mandated vaccinations.

Summary

Employers are reacting to the upcoming vaccine mandate in their own ways, informed by their unique circumstances. For some, they have been ready to mandate vaccines for months and needed cover from the government.

For others, the mandate represents a governmental overreach that will disintegrate workforces—although current research shows that only a small fraction of workers are choosing to quit in opposition to vaccine mandates already in place. This could be due to a variety of factors, including industry (i.e., health care workers may be more inclined to get vaccinated).

For now, employers will need to wait until OSHA releases more details on the mandate. But, there are still steps that can be taken in the meantime to prepare workforces, including distributing essential employee communications ahead of this upcoming rule.

Stay tuned for more updates from Evolution of Benefits as this situation develops.