

COVID Vaccine Employer Resources



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Unity Care NW
Health Care for Everyone

Intro

We all share a desire to end the COVID-19 pandemic and return to a healthy economy and community. The COVID-19 vaccine is one of the best strategies we have, so we all need to roll up our sleeves and do our part to get vaccinated and address the concerns of those who are hesitant about vaccination. Many residents may look to their employer in making decisions about whether to be vaccinated, so leaders of businesses and organizations can play an important role in encouraging employees to get vaccinated.

A question that has been raised frequently is whether employers can require that employees get vaccinated for COVID-19. To date, federal, state, and local authorities have not issued laws or regulations regarding employer implementation of mandatory vaccination policies for COVID-19 vaccines, which are currently under emergency use authorizations by the FDA. Employers should therefore look to existing laws and regulations that impact employer-based vaccination requirements and consult with legal counsel about options and policy decisions related to this question.

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This guide offers expert advice to help employers support their employees and communicate effectively about vaccination. It begins by laying out the steps to take in planning your approach, and includes recommended methods for communicating with employees, as well as effective language and strategies for encouraging employees to get vaccinated. Links to additional resources are presented throughout the guide.

If your answers are not addressed in this toolkit, or on the Whatcom County Health Department [COVID-19 Vaccine Information page](#), please contact the Whatcom County Health Department at: Health-COVIDVaccine@co.whatcom.wa.us.

Create a Plan

Some planning and research will help employers to be effective in motivating their workforce to get vaccinated for COVID-19. The following information will guide you through the planning process and direct you to many useful resources.

- **Get Started:** Educate yourself about the legal issues around [vaccinations in the workplace](#). Follow the latest CDC guidelines and updates to make decisions around vaccinations and staffing simpler.
- **Convene a Planning Group:** Form a planning group of vaccine champions to develop a vaccination plan. This can be a small group, but these leaders should reflect the diversity of your workforce and include an HR representative, and influential staff members. *Form a planning group of vaccine champions to develop a vaccination plan.*
- **Set Goals:** Set a goal and for the percentage of staff vaccinated (between 75%-85% is an attainable goal in most workplaces), and determine a process for achieving it.
- **Address Key Questions:** Some questions for your planning group to address are:
 - **Will you offer a vaccine clinic on-site or refer people to locations in the community?**
 - The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) [COVID-19 Vaccines Toolkit for Businesses and Employers](#) describes each option and provides strategies and promotional tools for each approach.
 - **What information do you need to provide employees about how to get vaccinated (e.g., where to go, how to make an appointment)?**
 - See [Whatcom County COVID-19 Vaccine Information](#) and Washington State [Vaccine Locator](#) for all the basic information.
 - **What information can you provide to staff who may have concerns about the vaccine?**
 - See information below about how to encourage employees who are hesitant to get vaccinated. Also see CDC resources to address common questions: [Key Things to Know](#), [Frequently Asked Questions](#), and [Myths and Facts](#).
 - **What incentives, if any, can you offer to motivate staff to get vaccinated?**
 - Incentives, even small ones like stickers, can help motivate people who may need a little encouragement to get vaccinated. There are some important legal considerations regarding incentives. See page 4 for more guidance on offering incentives.
 - **How can you promote vaccination?**
 - See the CDC [Essential Workers COVID-19 Vaccine Toolkit](#) for suggestions about promoting vaccinations.
 - **How will you plan your workflow and scheduling to allow employees time off for vaccination appointments and rest if they experience common vaccine side-effects such as fatigue or fever?**
 - This question is especially important to consider if you are going to have an on-site vaccine clinic to vaccinate many employees at one time.
 - **What potential barriers are unique to your workforce? What policies and practices could you implement to address them?**
- **Plan Communication Strategies:** Some suggestions for sharing vaccine information and encouragement are:

- Update employees (e.g., newsletters, intranet, emails) about the importance of COVID-19 vaccination, as well as how and where to get the vaccine in the community. The following templates can be edited to suit your needs:
 - [Template Letter/Email to Employees](#)
 - The WA DOH [COVID-19 Vaccine Partner Toolkit](#) includes [communication templates](#), social media, fact sheets, videos, etc. Materials are available in many languages.
- Hang posters in high-traffic common areas promoting vaccines and providing information about how and where to get them.
 - See CDC [Digital and Print Communications Resources](#).
- Host a staff meeting to discuss the vaccine and explain any incentives you will be offering.
- Invite a local medical provider to answer questions.
- Lead with listening. Emphasize an open-door policy and willingness to hear employees' questions or concerns and discuss resources to get their questions answered.
- **Track Your Progress:** Create a secure database to track which staff have received vaccines, and which staff have indicated they will not get vaccinated because of religious or medical reasons. It is advised to check with a lawyer before implementing any new tracking of medical records.
 - See [Sample Employee Vaccination Tracking Form](#)
 - See CDC's [Sample Letter - Declination of COVID-19 Vaccine](#).
 - The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires employers that obtain disability-related medical information about an employee to maintain it in a confidential medical file that is kept *separate* from the employee's personnel file.
- **Build Momentum:** Allow time for vaccine confidence to grow. Workers who are hesitant at first may become more confident after seeing coworkers get vaccinated.
 - Report to employees regularly on the progress being made to achieve your vaccination goal (e.g., send email updates, hang a poster displaying number of staff vaccinated and update it regularly). Report summary statistics only (i.e., do not share names of people).
 - Encourage staff to share photos on social media along with reasons why they chose to get vaccinated.
 - Provide [stickers](#) for employees to wear after they are vaccinated.
- **Update as Needed:** Guidance changes quickly with rapidly evolving COVID-19 information and response. Be ready to update policies regularly.
- **Celebrate Progress:** Let your customers/clients/colleagues know the effort your business is making to help end the pandemic.
 - Send an email with your company's staff vaccination story to your mailing list and promote your commitment to safety in your workplace.
 - Use national campaign hashtags like #ThisIsOurShot, and local hashtags like #SaferStrongerTogether or #WhatcomTogether in your social media posts.



Strategies for Encouraging Employees to Get Vaccinated

Some suggested enticements:

- **Pay for their time:** Establish flexible, non-punitive policies that allow for employees to take paid time off during work hours to get vaccinated and recover from vaccine side-effects, if necessary (e.g., paid sick leave). See [Questions about Coronavirus Vaccines and Paid Sick Leave \(WA L&I\)](#)
- **Offer incentives**, such as [Think Local First Gift Cards](#), to encourage staff to get vaccinated.
 - There are some important legal considerations regarding incentives in the Americans with Disabilities Act, HIPAA, and EEO rules that should be reviewed before offering incentives. For guidance see:
 - [Charting the Risk Associated with Common Workplace COVID-19 Vaccine Incentive Programs \(Fisher Phillips\)](#)
 - [What You Should Know about COVID-19 and the ADA, the Rehabilitation Act, and Other EEO Laws \(EEOC\)](#)
- **Provide transportation support** to help people get to and from vaccine sites, if needed (e.g., reimburse bus or rideshare fares).
- **Educate and assist** workers who are eligible for vaccination to make their appointments through available channels.
- **Reassure employees that vaccines are free** of charge. They should not be asked to pay any fee, including a vaccine administration fee, and cannot be denied vaccine if they do not have insurance coverage. Providers may bill their insurance plan or program for the administration fee if they have insurance.

What to Say

Outside of the healthcare field, most employers are not in a position to convey medical and scientific information about vaccines to their employees, and that's OK. With some general messaging guidance, all types of employers can help encourage hesitant employees to get vaccinated without needing to know medical or technical details about vaccines.

General communications about vaccines should:

- **Strive to build trust** with communications that are accurate, transparent, factual, and frequent.
- **Share messaging from trusted sources** such as medical professionals, community leaders, Whatcom County Health Dept., WA DOH, and the CDC.
- **Keep it simple**, conveying the message that COVID vaccines are here, they are safe, and they are the fastest route to a healthy community and economic recovery.
- **Address common concerns**, reassuring employees that COVID-19 vaccines were developed with the same science as previous vaccines for viruses like the flu and measles, and were rigorously tested. See [COVID-19 Vaccine Safety and Effectiveness \(WA DOH\)](#).
- **Encourage employees to get whichever vaccine is available**. All the vaccines are effective against hospitalization from COVID-19 and death.
- **Acknowledge that some people experience [side effects from the vaccine](#)** which should go away within a few days.
- **Ask questions** to find out how employees are feeling about the vaccine, be empathic, hear their questions and concerns.
- **Share your own story** about why you chose to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

DO:

- ✓ Focus on what we do know about the vaccine (e.g., "It is safe and effective.")
- ✓ Focus on the ways an individual's life will change for the better when they can enjoy many of their former activities again.
- ✓ Highlight the vaccine as a lifesaving tool.
- ✓ Emphasize a hopeful vision for a better collective future.
- ✓ Emphasize vaccine acceptance: most people want to get it.
- ✓ Be considerate to those who are unable to receive the vaccine for medical or religious reasons (e.g., "We're doing this for our co-workers who can't.")
- ✓ Refer staff to resources about vaccine efficacy.
- ✓ Answer any questions staff bring to you about company policy.
- ✓ End any dialogue by reiterating what there is to gain by getting vaccinated.

DON'T:

- ✗ Emphasize what we don't know about the vaccine (e.g., "We still don't know how long vaccine protection lasts.")
- ✗ Use moral judgements that may foster divisions (e.g., "We all need to get vaccinated because unlike some people, we care about our community.")
- ✗ Focus on what won't change after a person is vaccinated (e.g., "It will be a while until things are back to normal.")
- ✗ Reiterate masking and social distancing requirements without providing further explanation.
- ✗ Bring attention to the vaccine in relation to newer virus variants.
- ✗ Emphasize vaccine hesitancy.

See also [Language That Works to Improve Vaccine Acceptance: Communications Cheat Sheet](#) by deBeaumont.

Resources

- [Power & Immunity: Information for Protecting Our Bodies & Our Communities \(Amer. Lung Assoc.\)](#)
- [Essential Workers COVID-19 Vaccine Toolkit \(CDC\)](#)
- [FAQs About COVID-19 Vaccination in the Workplace: For Employers \(CDC\)](#)
- [Importance of COVID Vaccinations for Essential Workers \(CDC\)](#)
- [Language That Works to Improve Vaccine Acceptance: Communications Cheat Sheet \(de Beaumont\)](#)
- [What You Should Know About COVID-19 and the ADA, the Rehabilitation Act, and Other EEO Laws \(eoc.gov\)](#)
- [Fisher Phillips Vaccine Resource Center](#)
- [Questions about Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Vaccines and Paid Sick Leave \(WA State Labor & Industries\)](#)
- [This Is Our Shot \(National Assoc. of Manufacturers\)](#)
- [Local Why I Got Vaccinated Videos \(North Sound ACH\)](#)
- [COVID-19 Vaccination Resources \(Society for Human Resource Management\)](#)
- [Addressing Vaccine Hesitancy \(WA DOH\)](#)
- [COVID-19 Vaccine Partner Toolkit \(WA DOH\)](#)
- [COVID-19 Vaccine Safety and Effectiveness \(WA DOH\)](#)
- [COVID-19 Vaccines Toolkit for Businesses & Employers \(WA DOH\)](#)
- [Vaccine Locator \(WA DOH\)](#)
- [Whatcom County COVID-19 Vaccine Information](#)

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