

How to Increase COVID-19 Vaccination Willingness Among Employees

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Increasing employees' willingness to get vaccinated is a hurdle for many organizations. HR leaders can increase their willingness by providing educational resources about the vaccine, reducing barriers to vaccination and promoting vaccination success stories.

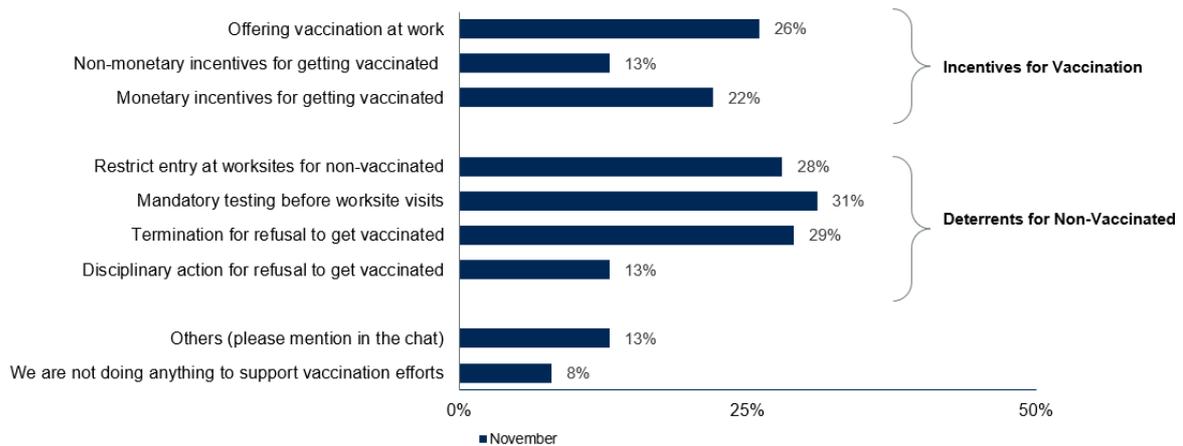
With the rise of the omicron variant and the increasing availability of booster shots, efforts to encourage employee vaccination are likely to remain a critical focus for many organizations. Yet employees' hesitancy and resistance to getting vaccinated against COVID-19 continues to challenge HR and business leaders. Fourteen percent of the public in the U.S. does not want to get vaccinated, while another 6% wants to "wait and see" before getting a vaccine. ¹ Negative reactions to past vaccination efforts for other vaccines (like flu vaccines); the rapid development, approval and implementation of COVID-19 vaccines; and fear of side effects are among the reasons some people will not get vaccinated.

Hesitancy to get vaccinated not only poses public health problems for governments and communities but also can present serious problems for businesses. Without widespread vaccination, businesses cannot gather employees, clients or customers in person freely. This limitation on gathering can negatively impact revenue and growth goals, particularly for businesses that depend on in-person interaction.

In a November 2021 Gartner poll, 92% of leaders indicated their organizations are taking one or more measures to encourage employee vaccination efforts (see Figure 1). And organizations' commitment to the vaccine extends beyond their employees; 73% of leaders also mentioned that their organizations will require suppliers and contractors to follow the same vaccine mandates as their employees. ²

Figure 1. Actions to Support Vaccination Efforts

Percentage of Executive Leaders



n = 120 (November)

Q: What is your organization doing to support vaccination efforts? (Select all that apply)

Source: Gartner Encouraging Vaccination and Implementing Mandates to Reopen Worksites Webinar Poll (16 November)

To overcome employees' unwillingness to get vaccinated, HR and business leaders should:

1. Educate employees on the personal and community impact of vaccination.
2. Remove barriers to vaccination.
3. Encourage stories of vaccination success.

Educate Employees on the Personal and Community Impact of Vaccination

Educating employees on the personal and community impact of vaccination can be a powerful strategy to dispel myths about and counter resistance to getting vaccinated. Many vaccination messaging campaigns focus on individual efficacy and side effects, especially since the vaccine was developed quickly and fears about its safety exist,³ but people have a variety of other concerns that HR leaders must address.

At the personal level, HR leaders must emphasize that the vaccine protects employees and allows them to return to the activities outside of work that they enjoy. They should explain how the vaccine will allow employees to return to more personal stability (e.g., a regular routine) sooner and increase access to space and services that they relied on before (e.g., childcare, dedicated office space). For many, the ability to travel again will be a strong motivator, particularly for employees who travel for work or for fun, and many airlines have already communicated that vaccines are required to board international flights.⁴ HR leaders can also share messages of how vaccination will help employees to prevent serious illness or death due to COVID-19 and its many variants. It may also be helpful for HR leaders to emphasize that even if employees experience side effects to the vaccine, they will be of far less severity than COVID-19 itself.

HR leaders can also emphasize the positive effects the vaccine will have on employees' communities; the more people get vaccinated, the safer their communities will be and the sooner everyone can return to the social activities they enjoyed before. Organizations with values centered around community, caring for others and/or health may also want to link vaccination to those values.

HR does not have to provide education around the vaccine on its own. Bringing in experts to speak about the vaccine and answer questions may provide assurance that the information employees are getting is correct and unbiased. Getting experts to talk about vaccines can also allow employees to discuss their unique concerns.

For historically underserved communities, experts familiar with their specific concerns are especially important; members of Black and Latino communities in the U.S. are three times more likely to be infected than members of white communities and twice as likely to die, yet hesitancy around the vaccine is higher for these groups than for other racial and ethnic groups.⁵ Messaging to other historically underserved groups, such as Native American tribal nations in the U.S. and Canada, requires familiarity with their healthcare systems and knowledge of their history with government health efforts to assure them of vaccine safety.

Remove Barriers to Vaccination

Beyond educating employees about the importance and benefits of getting vaccinated, HR and business leaders can also work to remove barriers to vaccination. In many cases, the most significant barriers to vaccination may be logistical rather than issues of access or doubts about the vaccine itself.

In March 2020, the Behavior Change for Good Initiative conducted a study to see what kind of employer messaging increased flu vaccine uptake the most. It found that vaccination rates increased dramatically when employers scheduled vaccinations for employees at a specific date and time that could be rescheduled. ⁶

Organizations don't have to schedule or administer the vaccine themselves to make it easy; Dollar General, Aldi and Trader Joe's are providing time off for vaccination and/or paying employees to get the vaccine to offset the cost and inconvenience of getting the vaccine for employees. ^{7,8} These organizations rely on their frontline workers' health and don't want employees to choose between the vaccine or work. Other organizations are using a mix of incentives and deterrents to encourage employee vaccination efforts. According to a Gartner poll conducted in November 2021, 35% of organizations are offering a mix of monetary and nonmonetary incentives to encourage vaccination, while 42% are resorting to termination or disciplinary action for employees who refuse to get vaccinated. ²

The best ways to make it easy for employees to get vaccinated may be specific to each organization's workforce. To find solutions, work backward from the question, "What are the most common practical reasons your employees might be choosing not to get the vaccine?" For example, bring vaccination clinics to the workplace if transportation is an issue, and provide local information about vaccination sites if information is unclear or hard to find.

Encourage Stories of Vaccination Success

HR leaders should also consider encouraging stories of vaccination success. Research has shown that one of the most influential predictors of a person's choice to vaccinate or not is the social norms of the community they belong to. ⁹

Public vaccination of key leaders is one way to promote vaccination stories; U.S. health and political leaders such as Dr. Anthony Fauci and President Joe Biden have televised their vaccinations to demonstrate the vaccines are safe. Sharing vaccination experiences (including getting the vaccination and after effects) of employees lower in the organization structure who work closely with clients and customers can also be quite powerful. HR leaders should consider how they can mobilize popular communication channels at their organization to promote both top-down and peer-to-peer encouragement to get vaccinated.

Conclusion

Widespread vaccination is a complex process, requiring the cooperation and coordination of HR, employees, local health officials and more. Organizations need to continue to evaluate efforts to increase employee vaccination rates as the pandemic evolves. As new variants of COVID-19 emerge and booster vaccines become increasingly important, encouraging and enabling employee vaccination efforts will be crucial.

Recommended by the Authors

[Implementing Vaccine and Testing Mandates in the U.S.](#)

[Quick Answer: When to Address Vaccination Status During the Hiring Process](#)

[5 Ways to Prepare for a Vaccine-Mandate-Driven Mass Turnover Event](#)

Endnotes

¹ [KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor: November 2021](#), Kaiser Family Foundation.

² 16 November 2021 Gartner Encouraging Vaccination and Implementing Mandates to Reopen Worksites Webinar Poll

³ [What to Expect After Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine](#), U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

⁴ [No Vaccine, No Service: How Vaccinations May Affect Travel Plans in the Future](#), CNBC.

⁵ [The Fullest Look Yet at the Racial Inequality of the Coronavirus](#), The New York Times.

⁶ [What Will Persuade People to Take a Vaccine?](#) The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

⁷ [Dollar General Will Pay Its Employees to Get the COVID-19 Vaccination](#), CBS News.

⁸ [Trader Joe's, Dollar General and Others Are Paying Workers to Get Vaccines](#), NPR.

⁹ [Economic and Behavioral Influencers of Vaccination and Antimicrobial Use](#), Frontiers in Public Health.

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