

Actions for Employers: Creating a Vaccination-Friendly Culture



Provide Information

The first step in creating a vaccination-friendly culture is ensuring that employees have easy access to accurate and up-to-date information regarding vaccines. Employers are a trusted source of information. During flu season and public health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, employers are often the first authority that employees turn to for guidance on when, how and where to get vaccinated. Health plans are valuable partners in disseminating information; work with your plan to understand what they're sharing with employees to coordinate messaging across the organization and to family members.



Promotion of vaccines needs to be multi-channel. You want good alignment and timeliness of the messages depending on the audience, population, time of year, etc.

Rhonda Rendall, DO, EVP and Chief Medical Officer, UnitedHealthcare,
Employer and Individual

Fact sheets and other information on recommended vaccines should be distributed to employees and also easily found via an online portal or platform.

You can find a vaccine schedule for adults here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/hcp/imz/adult.html>

And one for children here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/hcp/imz/child-adolescent.html>

These schedules are also reproduced in the appendix.



The CDC has a quick, self-administered quiz employers can share with employees so they know which vaccines they might need given their age, health status and other considerations. <https://www2.cdc.gov/nip/adultimmsched/>

Make It Easy for Employees to Get Vaccinated



Host workplace clinics and make it easy to get people in. Educate employees, provide help for them and facilitate clinical thought leadership for those who might be hesitant. All this has worked for us with our own colleagues, and it's what we talk about with our plan sponsors.

Cathy (Mary) Moffitt, MD, FAAP, CHIE, Vice President and Chief Medical Officer
Commercial, Aetna, CVS Health

Convenience is critical to getting employees and family members vaccinated. Here are some ways to make things easy:

- **Host monthly vaccination clinics** in house or at central locations throughout the year, *not just during flu season*—make vaccination a routine part of health prevention.
- **Partner with local community organizations** to host vaccination clinics. These clinics can serve employees, family members and members of the community.
- **Bundle vaccines** when possible—flu/COVID-19 or flu/pneumococcal, for example. Be sure to educate people about the safety of this practice.
- Use flu or other clinics to **ask about and assess** what other vaccines employees might need. If not available on site, make sure they know what to ask for at their local pharmacy or PCP.
- Align the timing of in-house clinics to **coincide with “bring your child to work” days**—an easy way to get dependents vaccinated.
- **Provide vouchers** for family members not covered by the employer benefits plan so they can get vaccinated at a pharmacy or other clinic.
- **Provide transportation subsidies** or vouchers for employees who need to travel to get vaccinated.
- **Offer additional time off** for vaccinations—an especially important consideration for shift workers.



Partnerships between the business community and education systems can be very fruitful, particularly around childhood immunizations. A measles outbreak at a school could be a lot more deadly than a COVID-19 outbreak, for example.

Rhonda Rendall, DO, EVP and Chief Medical Officer, UnitedHealthcare,
Employer and Individual

Goldman Sachs, in an effort to increase participation by providing convenient access, has nurses available to administer flu vaccines right to their people on many of the busiest floors in their New York City office.

Colgate-Palmolive has multiple locations where employees work outside the traditional 9-to-5. During flu season, Colgate facilitates onsite flu shots and offers vouchers for free pharmacy flu shots for employees and dependents not covered by Colgate's health plan. Colgate's health plan participants can get their flu shots at no cost at any in-network provider or pharmacy.

Boosting Vaccination Rates through Mandates

Once COVID-19 vaccines were made available, healthcare institutions and many other employers put vaccine mandates in place to protect employees and ensure that workplaces were safe for employees returning to offices. Many mandates were met with resistance, and many have since been relaxed except in healthcare settings. However, it was clear that mandates played an important role in increasing vaccinations during a public health emergency.

Employers may want to consider a limited role for mandates in the future, for example, mandating certain vaccines for employees traveling to specific countries. Thinking about when and how to implement mandates is also important in preparing for any future public health emergencies.



The role of pharmacies is huge — they offer education, awareness, appointments and a safe space to get vaccines, and they partner with payers. We believe pharmacies offer a big public health service to the American people.

Cathy (Mary) Moffitt, MD, FAAP, CHIE, Vice President and Chief Medical Officer
Commercial, Aetna, CVS Health

Communicate Your Organization's Commitment to Vaccination

Lead By Example

A powerful way to encourage positive health behaviors such as vaccination is for leadership to visibly demonstrate that they are engaging in those behaviors. **Having company leaders and peers act as role models can be an important signal to employees.**¹



When the CEO and CFO are all rolling up their sleeves to get vaccinated, it's a big statement.

Litjen (L.J.) Tan, MS, PhD, Chief Policy and Partnership Officer, Immunize.org



We promote COVID-19 boosters—the CEO mentioned them in our last town hall. Leadership plays an important role when it comes to messaging for COVID-19.

Michelle Martin, Sr. Vice President, Total Rewards, Paramount



Last year, we launched a podcast to offer employees a new way to learn how to protect themselves from COVID-19. 'The Water Cooler' podcast features updates from members of Con Edison's pandemic team, the latest information from the CDC, state and local health officials, and we have expert guest speakers too. Recently, a local hospital clinician appeared on the podcast to educate our workforce about COVID-19. We've also hosted numerous virtual town hall meetings to provide an open and transparent forum for senior leadership to engage with employees of all levels and answer questions — not just about vaccines but also our employer practices and everything we are doing to keep employees safe.

Jessica Friedland Lau, Section Manager, Benefits & Wellness Center of Excellence, Con Edison

Develop Effective Communication Campaigns

Campaigns to promote vaccination should be supported by mailers, social media, newsletters and employee platforms. When developing campaigns, incorporate behavioral economic principles.^{2,3,4} Consider these examples:

¹ <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/life-sciences/our-insights/getting-to-work-employers-role-in-covid-19-vaccination>

² <https://www.gainwelltechnologies.com/>

³ <https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/06/once-a-covid-19-vaccine-is-ready-getting-people-to.html>

⁴ <https://academic.oup.com/heapro/article/32/6/1067/2951036?login=false>

- Use statistics to state the **real risk** of contracting vaccine-preventable diseases and the protective power of vaccines for individuals and their loved ones.
- Educate about how vaccinations can **decrease long-term health risks**.
- Present vaccination as the **norm or standard of care**.
- **Tell stories** about people’s positive experiences with getting vaccinated and avoiding illness.
- **Make it personal**. Prompt people to think about how they or someone close to them got sick with a vaccine-preventable disease. Clearly outline the benefits of vaccination and how a decision to vaccinate impacts the health of loved ones.
- **Encourage risk/reward decision making** by asking people to consider how they might evaluate the decisions others make about vaccination.
- Emphasize **social good**—community protection—in addition to individual benefits.
- **Appeal to social norms** by demonstrating that leaders, managers and colleagues are getting vaccinated.
- Make sure employees featured in campaigns represent the **diversity** of your employee population and that messages are tailored for diverse populations and education levels.

Consider Incentives

Offering prizes, discounts, gift cards and giveaways can be a great way to encourage vaccinations. Such incentives work best when coupled with communications campaigns that educate employees and point them toward convenient ways to get vaccinated. Keep equity in mind — make sure incentives are accessible by all employees. And make them fun rather than worth significant monetary value to avoid negative implications for vaccine adherence if and when you remove them.

Paramount promotes vaccinations annually as part of a home mailer campaign focused on preventative care. In years past, mailers have included educational information, a note from a senior leader, and a giveaway that aligns with a key message. One year, the giveaway was Bombas socks with the message “with you every step of the way.” Another year, the mailer targeted all vaccinations with an emphasis on HPV vaccination efforts, and the giveaway was a power cord with the message “you have the power to save a life.”

Collaborate with DE&I Leadership and ERGs

Your organization’s diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) leadership can be a valuable partner in your efforts to increase vaccine confidence and improve vaccination rates among diverse groups of employees. Collaborating with your DE&I leadership can help you identify actions to take, resources to leverage and opportunities to align with other organizational health equity efforts.

A first step in working with your DE&I leadership might be to share information about disparities in vaccination and health outcomes from vaccine-protective diseases. Having data to share that's specific to your employee population is ideal but not critical.

An effective way for benefits and DE&I teams to explore vaccination disparities in employee populations is to seek views, experiences and suggestions from employee resource groups (ERGs). Participants may be willing to raise issues and describe challenges they and other members of diverse groups face in obtaining vaccinations. ERGs have been an effective platform for employees to express equity and social justice concerns within organizations. They can be similarly leveraged to surface concerns related to vaccination equity with leadership and to devise a collaborative strategy to address some of these concerns. ERGs also can be helpful for sharing targeted vaccine information for different populations.

Con Edison targets reminders about pediatric vaccines to parenting ERGs, which can be particularly important for promoting the COVID-19 vaccine for children under 5 years old.

Leverage your ERGs by hosting lunch-and-learn sessions with clinical experts to emphasize the importance of vaccinations. Identify employee champions from different segments of your employee population who are willing to talk about their experience getting vaccinated and why they chose to do so. In addition to imparting science-backed information, these sessions can facilitate frank, open conversations and pave the way for employees to feel heard and responded to in a non-judgmental environment.

ERGs can also help employers make connections for potential collaboration with community-based trusted entities to help boost vaccination among diverse populations.

Fight Misinformation



We're not just fighting an epidemic, we're fighting an infodemic. Fake news spreads faster and more easily than this virus and it's just as dangerous.⁵

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization (WHO)

Misinformation threatens the success of vaccination programs across the world. UNICEF, First Draft, Yale Institute for Global Health and PGP (The Public Good Projects) have partnered to create the *Vaccine Misinformation Management Field Guide*,⁶ which is designed to help organizations fight vaccine misinformation. Extensive in scope, the guide and accompanying material includes useful strategies for employers as well as other organizations and countries around the world. These include:

⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/vaccine-misinformation-management-field-guide>

⁶ <https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/vaccine-misinformation-management-field-guide>

Capture Attention

- Use visuals to attract attention and elicit emotional reaction.
- Show personalized content that will resonate with the people you're trying to reach.

Easy = True

- Keep messages clear.
- Repeat positive messages.

Be Credible

- Quote expert sources.
- Make information relevant to your target audience.

Motivate

- Communicate vaccination as an aspiration, not an action.
- Put vaccination in a “gain frame”—emphasize the benefits and “avoid needles and tears.”
- Use social norms as an implicit guide for behavior.
- Give people a way of coping with a threat.

Tell Stories

- Present stories in addition to facts.
- Use narratives to engage people.

[Immunize.org](https://immunize.org) can be a great reference source to help combat vaccination misinformation. It includes patient stories of individuals who have suffered from vaccine-preventable illnesses, how to address common religious concerns, and printable handouts that address the safety and effectiveness of vaccines.

Promote Immune Fitness as Part of Your Well-being Strategy



Most employers have a comprehensive wellness strategy that includes weight and nutrition, exercise, sleep, smoking cessation, stress management and the like — all essential to good health. Getting our immune system fit through vaccination is also part of this wellness and healthy aging approach.

Leonard Friedland, MD, Vice President, Director of Scientific Affairs and Public Health, GSK

Employers have invested heavily in wellness and well-being programs. An essential component of these programs should include preventive care, especially immunizations. They are one of the most cost-effective preventive efforts measured by return on value.

- **Encourage employees to have a PCP and attend annual wellness checkups.**



The annual wellness visit is so important for preventive care. It's the single point where a provider has an opportunity to assess an individual's whole health and all gaps in care like immunizations and cancer screenings that they may have.

Jannifer D. Harper, MD, VP, Chief Medical Officer, Anthem National Accounts, Elevance Health

- **Make sure virtual visits with healthcare providers and coaches include information and recommendations for vaccination.** Make sure the vendors you work with know this is an essential part of your employee health and well-being strategy.
- **Enlist your digital vendors in promoting vaccination as an essential piece of the health and wellness puzzle.** Get them to include vaccination in questionnaires, educational webinars and wellness challenges.
- **Include questions and recommendations on vaccinations in a health risk assessment,** if used, and provide information on vaccines at employee health fairs.



We don't have the same infrastructure for adult immunizations that we do for kids. We have an acute-care model for adults and a well-care model for kids, so we need to improve that adult infrastructure, and one way to do it is through employers.

Litjen (L.J.) Tan, MS, Ph.D., Chief Policy and Partnership Officer, Immunize.org

The NBA offers executive physicals for any employee and adult family member who wants one. Vaccination education and providing certain vaccines are part of these physicals.

Make Sure Vaccinations Don't Require Out-of-Pocket Expense

Cost should not be a barrier for receiving vaccinations. In most cases, it's not. Most private insurance plans must cover certain vaccines without out-of-pocket fees when provided by an in-network provider. This is true even for patients who have not met a yearly deductible. **Let your employees know that they won't have to pay out of pocket for recommended vaccines.**

Doses, recommended ages and recommended populations for vaccinations may vary in terms of coverage. The following vaccines are usually covered by health insurance:⁷

- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B
- Shingles (Herpes Zoster)
- Human Papillomavirus (HPV)
- Influenza
- Measles, Mumps, Rubella
- Meningococcal
- Pneumococcal
- Tetanus, Diphtheria, Pertussis
- Varicella

COVID-19 vaccines are currently free to everyone in the U.S. but this may change as federal funding declines. Other vaccines, such as those for typhoid, rabies and yellow fever, often needed for travel to remote locations outside the U.S., may not be covered through insurance.

Pregnancy care—something to check. All pregnant women should receive the flu and Tdap vaccines during pregnancy. If pregnancy care falls under a capitated rate with your health plan, either ensure these vaccines are removed from the capitated rate or raise the cap to include them.

Collect Vaccination Data About Your Employee Population

A significant barrier to improving vaccination coverage is the lack of a comprehensive system for documenting vaccinations. Centralized immunization registries exist for the pediatric population but not for adults. One of the long-term outcomes of the COVID-19 emergency is that public health departments began developing a vaccination infrastructure that can likely be leveraged for other vaccines. Developing immunization information systems that track adult immunizations is a key Healthy People 2030 goal, and employers can add their voice to demands for better national adult vaccination data.

Ask your health plan for annual or more frequent vaccination data so you can understand vaccination rates among employees and family members. If possible, ask for this data disaggregated by demographics of interest such as age, race and ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation so you can identify any possible disparities.

⁷ <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults/pay-for-vaccines.html>

The data you receive from your health plan may be incomplete for a variety of reasons including the fact that vaccinations are provided over the course of life and thus may not be reflected in an individual's records. Tracking vaccination is further complicated by the fact that people can obtain vaccinations from a wide range of sources including physicians, worksite flu clinics, pharmacies and community vaccination sites, not all of which document vaccinations systematically. Even when they do, systems may not be able to communicate and exchange data with other systems. Efforts are underway to improve the quality of vaccination data by encouraging the systematic documentation of vaccination in interoperable platforms by all vaccinators.

Set Goals for Employee Vaccination

While imperfect, any vaccination data you have access to can help you identify gaps and disparities, set goals, and explore where you might best target outreach and communications. Vaccination clinics can be especially helpful places to collect your own data to set targets and track improvement.

Advocate

Make sure your health plan knows that vaccination is a key priority for your organization. Support efforts to create quality measures that encourage providers to vaccinate, including encouraging co-administration of vaccines, increasing vaccination rates among pregnant women, and reducing vaccination disparities associated with diverse populations. Plans should disseminate key messages and educational resources to network providers and also monitor, measure and incentivize providers' immunization rates.

Employers can support the Immunization Infrastructure Modernization Act that is currently before the U.S. Senate. The measure would improve and expand information sharing between state and federal governments, as well as public and private healthcare providers, to ensure that vaccines are being administered effectively and efficiently across all states and territories.

Support Local Immunization Coalitions

Immunization coalitions are comprised of individuals and organizations working together to improve vaccination efforts in their communities, be they local, regional, statewide, multi-statewide, national or international. Their sizes, structures, leadership and ways of operating can vary.

[Immunize.org](https://www.immunize.org) is a national organization supported by the CDC. Chief Policy and Partnership Officer Litjen (L.J.) Tan calls employers “the next frontier for getting adults vaccinated” and says they can play a huge role in addition to offering flu clinics. For example, they can be active in their community and help provide coalitions with resources like organizational skills or professional zoom links. “It may sound simple, but these coalitions are small, so every little bit can help,” Tan says.

To explore the national network of immunization coalitions:
<https://www.immunizationcoalitions.org/>



Checklist of Action Steps

Use this checklist to identify and prioritize actions to take to create a more vaccination-friendly culture!

Provide Information

- Do your employees have access to accurate and up-to-date information on vaccines?
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Make It Easy for Employees to Get Vaccinated

- Do you host vaccination clinics or partner with other organizations to do so?
 Do you offer time off for obtaining vaccinations?
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Communicate Your Organization's Commitment to Vaccination

- Are your organization's leaders leading by example?
 Have you developed campaigns to promote vaccination supported by mailers, social media, newsletters and employee platforms?
 Have you considered combining incentives with your communication campaigns?
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Collaborate with DE&I Leadership and ERGs

- Have you shared information about vaccination disparities with ERGs?
 Have you encouraged them to share experiences, and asked them for suggestions to encourage vaccination?
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Fight Misinformation

- Are you actively fighting vaccine misinformation and employing tactics like using visuals, quoting experts and telling stories as part of your messaging?
 Are you emphasizing the benefits of vaccination and keeping messages clear and positive?
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Promote Immune Fitness as Part of Your Well-being Strategy

- Do you emphasize the importance of PCPs and wellness check-ups?
 Do you provide information on vaccines at employee health fairs?
 Have you enlisted your digital vendors in efforts to promote vaccination?
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Make Sure Vaccinations Don't Require Out-of-Pocket Expense

- Do your employees know they won't have to pay for recommended vaccines?
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Collect Vaccination Data About Your Employee Population

- Do you work with your health plan to collect data to track and better understand vaccination rates in your population?
 Do you set targets for selected vaccines and track progress?
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Advocate

- Does your health plan know vaccination is a key priority for your organization?

Some Helpful Resources

CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices

Recommended vaccine guidelines

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/acip-recs/index.html>

Vaccinate Your Family

Provides a list of credible organizations and websites for vaccine information and resources

<https://vaccinateyourfamily.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/VYF-Credible-Websites-for-Vaccine-Resources-November2021.pdf>

Let's Vaccinate

Provides resources to help providers and employers use tools and strategies that can help address disparities for vaccine-preventable diseases including COVID-19, across all ages

<https://www.lets vaccinate.org/>

Immunize.org (formerly Immunization Action Coalition [IAC])

Provides extensive resources for education on vaccines

<https://www.immunize.org/>

Health Action Alliance

Extensive resources and tools for employers

<https://www.healthaction.org/covid19>