



THE DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO COVID-19 VACCINATION AND THEIR IMPACTS ON YOUR WORKFORCE

In this article we explore the differences in vaccination policies currently being deployed; the impact this variation could have on employers; and what organizations should include in their corporate vaccination policies.

As vaccines for COVID-19 getting approved, distributed and administered around the world, the picture is becoming more complex and nuanced. Some countries are forging ahead, others are falling behind. The advent of new variants is creating uncertainties around how effective some vaccines will be in the long-term. And questions to people managers abound.

In this atmosphere, employers are increasingly starting to explore and understand when and how a vaccine will be made available and what their role might be. In some country's employers will be expected to play a role in running a vaccination campaign, while in others the role of employers, if any, is far less clear.

What is also unclear in many countries is the level at which COVID-19 vaccination is, or will become, mandatory, and required to enable access to certain services, or in certain occupational settings. Depending on the country and local laws, employers may be able to request a proof of COVID-19 vaccination, or an update on employee vaccine status. But not in others.

Employers are also starting to understand that vaccination within the employee population may play a bigger role beyond business continuity. It is not just a desire to get up and running again, or to facilitate travel, that is necessarily triggering this shift (although this is a key driver for many sectors). When organisations participate in a COVID-19 vaccination programme, or help with its communication, they are actively participating in facilitating the development of herd immunity in a community. Many businesses are appreciating that supporting the push towards vaccination is a societal public good.

However, the challenges for organisations in doing so are legion. Over the last few months International SOS has been working with numerous organisations who are exploring how to facilitate vaccination for their workforce. Among the many considerations that organisations are navigating, companies are now considering how best to educate their workforce about COVID-19 vaccinations; how to help them actively navigate the infodemic and misinformation; how vaccination might impact upon testing and quarantine protocols; and what impact the vaccine could have on return to office and travel requirements.

In many countries, employers are seen as a trusted source of information. However, organisations also need to tailor their education and communication materials to their local populations, mindful of the cultural issues that inform varied levels of vaccine acceptance around the world. Our role is not to dictate or cajole but to empower the right decisions based on science and a rational approach to risk and provide an opportunity to re-examine a decision not to be vaccinated – not to 'close doors'.

The latest vaccine developments, requirements and availability are however fast-moving. Providing real time, accurate information to help reduce vaccine hesitancy and misinformation is thus increasingly important to build employee confidence. Employees should feel confident around their responsibility, be empowered with the information they need to make a choice and be clear on what steps they need to take to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. An employer's role in communicating this is as key to public health as the efficacy of a particular brand of vaccine.



However, many issues remain unclear for many organisations. Should they simply support COVID-19 vaccinations at strategic level, or should they encourage or actively provide access to COVID-19 vaccine for employees? What about contractors or visitors that are crucial to operations? Should families be considered? How does citizenship or residency impact this? What are the ethical issues to agree upon before embarking upon a corporate vaccination strategy? We have compiled some of the main approaches we recommend global organisations consider below.

Assisting in defining local guidelines

Organisations play an important role in communicating these instructions and can help defining these guidelines by:

- Providing communication materials to the local workforce on priority groups and the steps local employees should take to receive the vaccine recommended by health authorities
- Emphasising the importance and benefit of the local recommended vaccine(s)
- Offering an opportunity for question and answer with a trained health professional
- Providing materials on the recommended vaccine in their country, how many doses are required, or the need for boosters
- In some countries, creating positive incentives to receive a vaccine may be permissible, based on local legislation (e.g. vaccination tracker, recognition etc)
- In some countries, employers may be permitted (or expected) to identify those in higher priority groups that should be given access to vaccination first
- In some countries, requesting vaccine certificates may be permissible, or may even be required in future under health and safety regulations

Providing employees tools to navigate the system

Providing employees and managers with the latest information on vaccine developments can help ease concern and allay anxiety. This can take the form of:

- Providing employees and managers with assistance on how to access a vaccine in their location to help speed up access
- Facilitating employees accessing vaccination, either in terms of flexible working arrangements or paid time off
- Reducing logistical challenges by offering administrative support to relieve pressure on managers
- Assisting employees to resolve any language barriers which can be especially helpful for international assignees
- Providing access to medical advice to help employees decision-make especially if choices are needing to be made on the type of vaccine, or in which country a vaccine could be accessed.



Assisting with vaccine procurement and enabling access

With the risk of fake vaccines and forged vaccination passports ever present, enabling quality oversight of any vaccine programme has never been more important. Employers can address this by:

- Providing a verified global overview of current vaccination availability and strategies being rolled out
- Assisting managers to navigate potential issues around vaccine quality and identify suitable local providers
- Providing access to the vaccine through a reputable external provider (e.g. nurse on site or office vaccination clinics), which may become available in some countries
- Understanding where international assignees might be able to avail of national vaccination programmes in their country of residence, and assisting them to enable access

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