

Should the Delta Variant Impact Your Organization's Vaccination Strategy?

Considerations for Employers

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The Delta variant—a new, more transmissible form of COVID-19 that is causing more severe disease—is spreading rapidly throughout the world and currently poses the greatest threat to the unvaccinated and partially vaccinated. The longer Delta circulates, the higher the chance for mutations and the emergence of more contagious and dangerous variants that may cause further morbidity and mortality. New variants may also decrease the effectiveness of vaccines and other drugs used to treat COVID-19. The currently deployed vaccines in the U.S. are still preventing severe disease from Delta; however, some manufacturers report there may be waning immunity from vaccines and are working to develop boosters. As the virus continues to spread, public health and elected officials around the world have escalated the call for people to get vaccinated.

In the U.S., 66% of the eligible population over age 12 has been partially vaccinated, and 57% has been fully vaccinated; however, rates vary by region and many states, particularly in the South, have lower vaccination rates¹. The Delta variant is now one of the most prevalent strains in the U.S., causing spikes in cases, hospitalizations, and deaths in states with lower vaccination rates.

What approaches have employers taken, and how can they continue to boost vaccination rates?

Employers play an essential role in protecting the health of the public, their workforce, and the economy. The first decision point is around whether to require vaccination. Employers should then consider focusing on encouraging vaccination and removing barriers.

Approaches to Requiring Vaccination

Employers can require workers entering the workplace to be vaccinated against COVID-19 according to [recent EEOC guidance](#) (if an employee has a disability or religious belief, they may be entitled to an accommodation). Sectors that have moved toward mandating vaccines include health care and higher education (for students, faculty, and staff).

Some employers are still reluctant to mandate the vaccine while it is under FDA emergency use authorization. Both Pfizer and Moderna have applied for full authorization and are awaiting FDA review/decision.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations>



Approaches to Encouraging Vaccination

Employers who are not currently mandating the vaccine can help to decrease vaccine hesitancy and promote vaccine confidence through education, access, and incentives. Understanding the rationale for hesitancy and providing accurate, understandable information from the CDC and other reputable sources to improve vaccine confidence and address concerns is critical. To assess the need for interventions and target populations and messages, employers have performed anonymous surveys to estimate the percentage of their workforce vaccinated by geography, business unit/job function, and to identify the main barriers to vaccination. Barriers may include questions regarding the efficacy and safety of the vaccine, concern regarding both side effects and long-term effects of the vaccine, and general anxiety regarding the vaccine. Vaccine hesitancy varies by ethnic and cultural group and communications tailored to specific populations and produced in languages representative of the workforce will be more effective. Holding town halls and bringing in experts to share information, using senior leaders and peers as visible champions of vaccination, and emphasizing there is no cost to vaccination may help to move people who are undecided about getting vaccinated.

Approaches for Improving Access

Providing on-site vaccinations, sharing information about [how and where to get vaccinated](#), covering rides to and from vaccination sites, and giving employees time off to get vaccinated and also for vaccine side effects may further decrease barriers to vaccination.

Options for employer partners for on-site and near-site vaccination include local health systems, national and local retail pharmacies, local health departments, and independent vaccine vendors. For global employees leveraging health plan and vendor partners, and working with local public health authorities can be useful in increasing vaccination access and decreasing hesitancy.

Approaches for Incenting Vaccination

Employers are also using incentives to encourage vaccination, including cash, gift cards, and extra PTO days. Making employees aware of other incentives may also help to encourage vaccination including [state lotteries and freebies and giveaways](#) that people can get with their vaccination card. The ultimate incentive is that fully vaccinated people can safely resume many activities as before the pandemic without social distancing or masks, depending on federal, state, and local regulations and workplace policies.

Are there additional considerations related to the potential “twindemic?”

With flu season rapidly approaching, the threat of a “twindemic” is a possibility. To help keep the country and economy open, and to protect global employees, employers should act now to help ensure their workforce is vaccinated against both COVID-19 and the flu. Flu season begins in October and generally runs through May—so employers should plan now for education, on-site vaccination if applicable, and vaccination incentives if desired.

Presently, it is not clear whether COVID boosters will be needed or recommended. It is therefore important for employers to keep informed of updates and recommendations from both the CDC and COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers.

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