

THE COVID-19 VACCINE AND YOUR EMPLOYEES

BY STEVE BROWN

Americans collectively watched more than 57 billion minutes of “The Office” in 2020, making it the year’s most heavily streamed television show, according to Nielsen. Between social distancing and cabin fever, it’s not surprising that so many would seek out a little comic relief. Or maybe the show’s popularity reflects the fact that people yearn to return to shared workspaces. But, before that can happen, businesses will have to determine whether or not they will require employees to get the COVID-19 vaccination and, if so, how they will handle the details.

While the availability of coronavirus vaccines is still primarily limited to emergency medical services personnel and a small portion of the population, there will eventually become a point when they will be readily available to everyone. Yet, many people are still skeptical about taking vaccines that were developed and pushed out so quickly. Businesses, including community financial institutions (CFIs), will need to determine how to address vaccination requirements. We give you the lay of the land to make the best decisions for your employees and your business.

PUBLIC SENTIMENT

Public sentiment regarding vaccination is varied. According to a recent survey conducted by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, only 47% of people are certain that they will get a vaccine when it is available to them, while 26% do not plan to get it and the remaining 27% are uncertain. Age also factors into people’s willingness to be vaccinated. Of those who definitely plan to get vaccinated, 62% are 60 years old or above, while that number drops to 51% of people aged 45 to 59.

HERD IMMUNITY

In order for the U.S. to reach the goal of herd immunity, scientists predict that roughly 70% of the population will need to be inoculated. Companies are looking for guidance on vaccinations for their employees to help reach this goal.

When deciding whether to require vaccinations, remember that some employees may not feel safe

to return. A recent survey of technology employees conducted by the private social network operator, Blind, found that only 36% of respondents would be okay returning to their offices without vaccine requirements.

GUIDANCE PROVIDED

In response to the need for guidance, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission confirmed that organizations can require vaccinations, but certain accommodations must be considered. Similar to the rules governing public schools, the EEOC notes that organizations may need to exempt individuals whose religious beliefs are against vaccinations along with those with disabilities. CFIs considering making vaccinations mandatory should contact local health officials and make sure they are well versed in the most current rules and regulations before imposing any policies regarding vaccinations.

PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS

It is also important to understand the differences within your employee population before implementing any rules, in order to acknowledge and address specific concerns. Specifically, certain ethnicities may have preconceived notions or fears about vaccines, based on the historical treatment of their ancestors by the medical community.

COMMUNICATING CLEARLY

Whatever your institution decides to do regarding vaccinations, your organization’s policy should be clearly communicated to employees, including any potential repercussions for not adhering to the policy guidelines. Working with local health authorities to unambiguously explain the importance of vaccinations for the workplace as a whole is also a good idea. The executive team should be accessible and serve as important role models to your employees through this process as well.

A mass vaccine rollout still hasn’t happened. However, it is critical to be prepared for when the time comes.

Continue to stay safe out there! 🍷



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