

# A SAFER Tomorrow: A Review of COVID-19 Workplace Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Future Actions

## PURPOSE

To understand the impact of COVID-19 on worker health and safety and advise on future pandemic-related employer actions.

## METHODS

A series of surveys were distributed nationwide between November 2021 and August 2022 to workers and employers. The data presented in this report are representative of responses from more than 7,000 workers and 1,600 employers.



## KEY FINDINGS

1

The mental health and wellbeing of workers has suffered during the pandemic, and employers are responding to meet the increasing need for supportive interventions.

- Fifty percent of large employers (250+ employees) have observed an increase in mental health or impairment-related absences and incidents during the pandemic.
- Of employers with an employee assistance program (EAP), one in four had implemented the EAP for the first time and two-thirds had expanded EAP offerings during the pandemic.

2

The impact of the pandemic and the safety, mental health and wellbeing of workers varies across industries and occupations.

- Feeling unsafe at work, physically or psychologically, is associated with negative mental health outcomes. Survey respondents who felt unsafe at work were two to three times more likely to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety disorders.
- More than 20% of people who work in healthcare, education and public-facing settings report feeling unsafe at work due to the risk of catching COVID-19.
- Sixty percent of people who work in public-facing roles and had a history of infection said it was extremely likely they caught COVID-19 on the job.

3

In August 2022, 70% of organizations with more than 250 employees required proof of vaccination from some or all workers, and 79% of requirement policies included booster doses.

- On average, employers with vaccine requirements retained 99% of their workforce.
- Of employers who noticed a change in morale after requirements took effect, two-thirds noted the change was an improvement in worker morale.

4

Vaccine policies such as paid time off encourage higher vaccine uptake among those who are not required to be vaccinated.

- The vaccination rate for workers who receive PTO for vaccine appointments was 12 percentage points higher than those who did not.
- People who receive information about vaccine safety and efficacy from their employers are better at identifying misinformation and more likely to be vaccinated.
- Seventy-eight percent of large employers provide incentives or encouragements to help working parents get their children vaccinated, such as paid time off, onsite vaccination for families, or gifts and bonuses.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

1. Support the mental health and wellbeing of workers through the pandemic and beyond. Consider resources, such as the [NIOSH Total Worker Health Workbook](#), when implementing interventions to assess and support total worker health at your organization.
2. Periodically re-evaluate control measures for infectious disease protection to future-proof your workplace for new, more contagious variants and future disease outbreaks.
3. Monitor the common method of transmission of new COVID-19 variants and emerging diseases and assess whether the priority of new control measures should be aimed at mitigating airborne or fomite transmission.
4. If vaccine requirements are in place at your organization, routinely update policies as new CDC guidance on booster doses becomes available.
5. Continue to implement policies that encourage vaccination as workers require booster doses to maintain up-to-date vaccination status.
6. Reduce barriers preventing working parents from getting their children vaccinated, such as providing PTO or onsite vaccination for families.