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Safe Actions For Employee Returns

A Workplace Guide to the Vaccine Conversation

Since December, the largest vaccination effort in the history of the world has been underway. Five months in, as organizations explore a return to traditional work environments (or continue operations in environments that have remained open); workers have questions that we all can help answer.

The below conversation guide and other resources, developed by NSC partner Health Action Alliance, will help leaders, employees, and workers delivering information, building trust and supporting colleagues who may need extra help accessing vaccines. For more resources, visit <http://healthaction.org/resources> and <https://www.nsc.org/safer>.

Tips for Talking About COVID-19 Vaccines

1. Listen more than you talk

This is a conversation, not a debate. It's not your job to convince people to get vaccinated. Rather, you're sharing information to help them make their decision. Be positive, inviting and respectful. Acknowledge "the choice is yours to make with your doctor or health care provider."

2. Lead with empathy

Acknowledge that it's OK for everyone—even you—to have questions about vaccines. Don't talk down to people, lecture or make people feel guilty. Instead, be understanding, positive and hopeful. Also, acknowledge that your members may have either been directly impacted by COVID-19 or have lost someone they care about to the virus.

3. Respect concerns—of all kinds—and steer to facts

People may be concerned about the vaccine for different reasons, from historic and current racism in health care, to concerns about the safety of the vaccine, to misinformation and rumors spreading on social media. Ask questions to reveal the source of concern, then offer facts.

4. Facts about safety matter

Don't just say, "The science is solid." Provide facts about the safety and efficacy of vaccines using the talking points provided below, and provide information about your company's vaccine policies. Remember, you shouldn't give medical advice, so encourage people with more advanced questions to talk with their doctor or health care provider. Finally, be sure to speak plainly and in a manner everyone will understand.

5. Emotions are important

Show how vaccinations can help us get back to the things we love, like connecting with others, spending time with family and friends, and getting businesses up and running. Some people may feel fear or mistrust. Others may be frustrated it is difficult to get an appointment. Listen for these feelings and share facts to help people work through their concerns and frustration.

6. Be inviting

"Hesitancy" has made headlines, which may be reinforcing some people's concerns if they perceive that "no one like me is getting vaccinated." Instead, as more people get vaccinated, ask them to share their stories with others. Hearing from someone who's already been vaccinated—why and how they decided, what it was like and how they got the vaccine—is one of the best ways to put others at ease. Celebrate the people who have taken this step for their health and the health of others. As access becomes easier, reinforce the ease of getting vaccinated.

7. Be authentic

If you're comfortable, share why you're planning to get vaccinated at your earliest opportunity, and why vaccines are important to you and your family.

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8. Be patient

Some people may need a lot of information or need to hear or read the same information multiple times. Continue to steer them to [GetVaccineAnswers.org](https://www.getvaccineanswers.org) and [Vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) and also continue to encourage them to talk to their doctor. Also, be ready for people who are holding tight to myths and may challenge you—just keep calmly reiterating the facts.

9. Keep politics out of it.

Getting vaccinated is a deeply personal choice, and people want to keep politics out of it. Instead, emphasize how vaccines will reduce government restrictions on our lives and our freedoms. Without widespread vaccination, mask mandates and personal lockdowns will continue.

10. Create a safe space for those who choose not to get vaccinated.

The fact is no community or individual shares all the same beliefs, perceptions and concerns. Every employee deserves to have their questions answered before making a decision about vaccines. Ultimately, it is important to create a safe, supportive workplace culture where all workers feel supported.

Talking Points

- We want everyone, especially in our community, to have trusted information about COVID-19 vaccines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and other public health sources.
- That's why our company is participating in the Health Action Alliance, a national network of businesses and health experts working together to accelerate our country's COVID-19 response and strengthen public health. We'll continue to share information about COVID-19 vaccines from trusted sources.
- There are multiple COVID-19 vaccines that have been authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). This means the clinical evidence for the vaccines has met the agency's rigorous scientific standards and they are considered to be safe and effective. They have been studied in clinical trials with large and diverse groups of people, of various ages, races and ethnicities.
- Vaccines teach our immune systems how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19 without having to get sick or put yourself and others at risk of severe illness and death.
- Getting vaccinated is a much safer way to build protection than getting the disease. COVID-19 can have serious, long-term or life-threatening complications, and there is no way to know how COVID-19 will affect you. And if you get infected, you could spread the disease to friends, family and others around you.
- You may have some side effects after getting vaccinated. That's a normal sign that your body is building protection—and they should go away within a few days. Your arm may be sore or swollen. You may also feel tired, have a headache, fever or chills. This does not mean you have COVID-19—in fact, it's not possible to get COVID-19 from vaccines.
- Vaccines are being administered by trained health professionals. Some people might be offered a vaccine that requires two doses, given several weeks apart, while other people might be offered a single-dose vaccine. It may take several weeks after vaccination for your body to be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed.
- Here's how you can make an appointment and get a vaccine...

Conversation Starters

- Approach each conversation with respect for your members' lived experiences. Be authentic and hold space for employees who may not be ready to continue the conversation.
- I thought we could start with a conversation about how everyone is feeling about vaccines and what information you need to answer any questions. My role is to support you and help you find the answers you need. Would it be OK to have this conversation with you? (Or) Are you ready to have this conversation?
- Do you know how to go about signing up to get vaccinated, or where a nearby vaccination site is located?
- Does anyone know someone who has gotten vaccinated?
- Has anyone here gotten vaccinated and want to share your story?
- Is anyone ready to get vaccinated? Why is that?
- If you feel comfortable sharing, what is the first thing you plan to do once fully vaccinated?
- Is there anything the company can do to make it easier for you to get vaccinated at your earliest opportunity? Is there anything our employee resource group can do to help make it easier for you to access vaccines?
- Are there questions you've been thinking about asking but not sure who is the best person to ask? Talk to your doctor. We all need to be comfortable with our decisions and your doctor can help.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **Were the vaccines tested on people from different racial and ethnic groups?**

The vaccines available today are authorized by the FDA after meeting the agency's rigorous requirements for safety and efficacy, as shown in clinical testing. They have been studied in clinical trials in large and diverse groups of people, of various ages, gender identities, races and ethnicities. In clinical trials for approved COVID-19 vaccines:

 - Black Americans represented about 10% of participants in trials for the first two COVID-19 vaccines.
 - Hispanic Americans represented about 20% of participants in trials for the first two COVID-19 vaccines.
 - Trial participation data not available for American Indians and Alaska Natives; this invisibility in data exacerbates mistrust.
 - Although people of color are underrepresented in the clinical trials compared to their share of the population, these trials have achieved greater diversity than many previous trials for other drugs. Greater diversity is needed in future trials.
 - Vaccine safety and efficacy were similar for people of color and white participants.

- **Is vaccination available for people who are undocumented?**
 - Yes. DHS and its federal government partners fully support equal access to COVID-19 vaccines and vaccine distribution sites for undocumented immigrants. Additionally:
 - U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection will not conduct enforcement operations at or near vaccine distribution sites or clinics.
 - Consistent with ICE's long-standing sensitive locations policy, ICE does not and will not carry out enforcement operations at or near healthcare facilities, such as hospitals, doctors' offices, accredited health clinics, and emergency or urgent care facilities, except in the most extraordinary of circumstances.

Resources for Employees

- **Handout:** [COVID-19 Vaccines: What You Need to Know](#) (Also in [Spanish](#))
- **Handout:** [COVID-19 Vaccines: Frequently Asked Questions](#) (Also in [Spanish](#))
- **Handout:** [COVID-19 Vaccines: Myths & Facts](#) (Also in [Spanish](#))
- **Handouts: COVID-19 Fact Sheets for Specific Employee Groups**
 - [Black and African American Employees](#)
 - [Hispanic American Employees](#) (Also in [Spanish](#))
 - [American Indian and Alaska Native Employees](#)
 - [Asian and Pacific Islander Employees](#)
 - [LGBTQAI+ Employees](#)
 - [Employees with Disabilities](#)
- **Handout:** [Dealing with Pandemic Stress & Anxiety](#)