

Why Should Employers Care About Improving Employee Vaccination Rates?

Overview

Herd immunity has protected our nation's individuals and businesses for many years. Employers have not needed to worry about their businesses being impacted by diseases such as measles, polio and pertussis. A perfect storm is now looming as vaccination rates among children dip and adult rates for some preventable diseases remain low. Employers can reduce this threat by taking steps to improve employee confidence in and use of vaccines as a safe and effective way to prevent diseases.



LOOK FOR THIS ICON

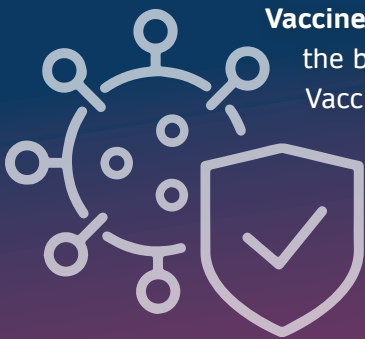


This Action Brief provides information for employers on ways to improve vaccination rates, including:

- Business case for promoting vaccinations in the workforce
- Important action steps employers can use to develop a workplace strategy
- Questions to ask your medical carriers, along with recommendations on health care benefits design and coverage
- Leading factors that can influence vaccine confidence, including how family, peers, community, culture and politics can influence confidence
- Tips on effective member communications and plan design strategies
- Helpful resources to assist in developing and implementing a plan

As you review the Action Brief look for this icon which represents employer quotes and case studies from health benefits professionals.

Definition of Terms



Vaccine: A preparation that is used to stimulate the body's immune response against a disease. Vaccines are usually administered through needle injections, but some can be administered by mouth or inhaled through the nose.

Vaccination: The act of introducing a vaccine into the body to produce protection from a specific disease.

Immunization & Inoculation: The process of becoming immune through vaccination.

Herd Immunity: Otherwise known as community immunity: The way in which an entire community is protected by immunizing a certain percentage of individuals. A disease is less likely to spread if enough people in the population are immune. [Herd immunity](#) helps to protect those who have not acquired immunity to the disease.

The Business Case for Improving Vaccination Rates

Childhood Immunizations – The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) estimates that vaccination of children born between 1994 and 2018 in the U.S. will:

- Prevent 419 million illnesses
- Help avoid 936,000 deaths
- Save nearly \$1.9 trillion in total societal costs
- Save \$406 billion in direct medical costs



For the 2020-21 school year, vaccination coverage nationally was 93.9% for two doses of measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine (MMR); 93.6% for the state-required number of doses of diphtheria, tetanus and acellular pertussis vaccine (DTaP); and 93.6% for the state-required doses of varicella vaccine. Compared with the 2019–20 school year, vaccination coverage decreased by approximately [one percentage point](#) for all vaccines.

Adult Immunizations

Employers should also be concerned about adult immunization rates for easily transmitted diseases such as influenza and COVID-19. As explained by the [CDC](#), influenza vaccinations during the 2019–2020 season prevented an estimated 7.09 million illnesses, 3.46 million medical visits, 100,000 hospitalizations and 100 deaths associated with influenza. While COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy continues to be concerning, it is equally concerning that despite many years of data regarding safety and effectiveness, and broad availability of vaccines, **60% of U.S. adults remained unprotected from highly infective influenza at the end of 2022.**

What impact could this have on an employer's bottom line? Are businesses at risk of losing high levels of productivity again? Do these numbers indicate a progression towards a potentially serious threat to community health and the success of businesses across the nation?

Improving vaccination rates is an integral part of employer efforts to promote health and wellbeing among employees and family members. Employers can increase trust in the science of vaccines and build vaccination confidence in a credible and approachable manner.

Measles Outbreak Example



The [highly infectious measles virus](#) is spread through droplets that can remain in the air for up to two hours and infect 90% of non-immune people who come into contact with it. A [95% measles vaccination rate](#) is required for herd immunity to occur. During the 2020-21 school year, an immunization rate of $\geq 95\%$ was reported by only 16 out of 47 states. The [vaccination rate](#) was $< 90\%$ by 7 states and Washington, D.C.

A measles outbreak could impact employee productivity in several ways:

1. Parents may have to stay home from work to take care of sick children
2. Non-immune adults may become sick themselves
3. Immune-compromised employees may be unable to work as a result of needing to avoid exposure

The Economic Burden of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases

While vaccines save money, treating vaccine-preventable diseases can be expensive for local, state and national authorities:

MEASLES OUTBREAK IN A STATE:
 **\$1.3 Million^{vii}**



WHOOPING COUGH OUTBREAK IN A SINGLE SCHOOL:

 **\$52,000^{vi}**

AVERAGE FLU SEASON:

 **\$87 Billion^{viii}**

 **VACCINATE YOUR FAMILY**
The Next Generation of Every Child By Two

^{vi} Summa Medical Group. (2014). Infections, incubation and contagious periods. Accessed 29 January 2019. http://www.summamedicalgroup.com/library/bedside_health/mmg_incubation/.
^{vii} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Local health Department Confirms Associated with Response to a School-Based Rubella Outbreak." - Omaha, Nebraska, September - November 2008. "Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)." January 18, 2011. 62(01):1-9.
^{viii} Minnesota's Department of Health. "Health officials declare end of measles outbreak." 25 August 2017. Accessed 8 December 2017. <http://www.health.state.mn.us/news/pressrel/2017/measles082517.html>.

STATE OF THE **IMM**UNION

Influencers of Vaccine Confidence

When building a plan to increase workplace vaccination rates, employers must consider the many factors that can influence vaccination confidence for their covered population. The decision to obtain a vaccination can be influenced by family, peers, community, culture and politics.

Examples of factors that may **positively** influence vaccination confidence include:

- Clear, concise, accurate and repetitive information about the safety and effectiveness of vaccines in the prevention of avoidable childhood and adult illnesses
- Communication campaigns that include role models to promote confidence in the safety and effectiveness of vaccines
- Goal-oriented immunity tracking tools to demonstrate that peers (e.g. colleagues, friends, neighbors) are utilizing preventive vaccinations

Examples of factors that may **negatively** influence vaccine confidence include:

- Misguided beliefs about the dangers of specific vaccines, caused by media or peer misinformation
- Concerns about side effects, safety and whether to get vaccinated while pregnant
- Taking a “wait and see if it’s safe” attitude based on concerns about the speed at which today’s vaccines are being developed due to advances in medical science, when compared to older vaccines, which took years to develop
- Religious and/or philosophical anti-vaccine beliefs
- Political views, including lack of trust in the government
- Distrust of medical professionals and/or science



- Misinformation about previous illness providing better protection than vaccines against future illness from multivariant viruses
- Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) – i.e., lack of transportation, childcare, or finances; inflexible work schedules; language barriers and cultural differences in utilization of preventive services; limited access to vaccination programs, etc.



Benefits of Workplace Vaccination Programs

For Employees

- Reduced work absences due to illness and related physician visits
- Improved family health
- Convenient and easy access to vaccines
- Reduced exposure to physician waiting rooms and potential exposure to others who may be ill



For Employers

- Turn-key programs are available through a variety of community resources with minimal employer involvement
- Programs can be accurately budgeted with funding through employee health plans or direct vendor payment
- Worksite programs can result in reduced costs related to employee absences and lowered productivity caused by vaccine-preventable illnesses

Employer Case Studies & Action Steps

In 2022, MBGH conducted an employer work group and series of interviews with health benefits professionals from mid and large public and private employers on their views and perspective of workplace vaccination programs and strategies to address vaccine confidence. These three case studies highlight employer examples.

Case Study – Midwest Municipal Government – 800 Employees

To improve vaccination compliance, we provided employees with:

- Easy access to vaccines by administering them onsite or at employee events
- COVID vaccinations are provided by the local health department at no cost to employees – so there is no loss of work time

- Beginning in 2023, employees are being offered a \$100-dollar wellness incentive when testing and vaccinations are done through their primary care physician

Plans for the future: We will continue to conduct educational programs as they have been found to reduce employees' fear of receiving the COVID vaccination.



Case Study – National Financial Services Company – 6,000 Employees



A COVID vaccine mandate was implemented for all employees once the vaccines were readily available. This mandate included the requirement to be vaccinated against COVID if the employee came to the office or attended work events, either onsite or offsite. Initially, proof of vaccination was required. This restriction has been eased. The company made two important benefits and policy decisions:

1. We now offer four hours of wellness time annually, which allows employees to take paid time to get preventive services, including vaccinations.
2. We will continue to cover COVID tests with no copay even when the tests are no longer required.

Plans for the future: We plan to continue to strongly encourage vaccinations and/or face masks onsite.

Case Study – Midwest Manufacturing Company – 1,600 Employees

Our organization's health & wellbeing vision is: *To improve the overall health and wellbeing of employees and their families by encouraging prevention, increasing awareness through ongoing education and maximizing participation in wellness programs that promote healthy lifestyle choices.*

Key objectives include:

- Our Healthy 2030 Prevention target goal is to have 75% of employees and spouses complete all recommended routine visits, vaccinations and cancer screenings within 12 months of the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) guidelines.
- The over-arching objective is to remove all barriers to obtaining the necessary care by making it easy, accessible and

affordable – with no cost to employees and their families, whenever possible.

- Vaccinations will be available at the company's onsite health & wellness (H&W) center at no cost to the employee and dependents. This satisfies the company's triple-pronged objective: easy, accessible and affordable.

The original vaccination strategy focused prevention in five areas. We learned that gathering data around mental health/substance abuse prevention, as well as integrating vision and dental screenings with routine physicals provided through the medical plan data was challenging. This was due to the multiple fragmented systems and/or billing/payment coding. The five areas included:

1. Cancer screenings
2. Routine physicals, including vision & dental
3. Immunizations
4. Cardiovascular (blood pressure, cholesterol)
5. Mental health/substance abuse

We identified several ways to overcome these barriers by:

- Working with our broker, H&W center, navigation services, data warehouse and medical plan to identify the information we could track.
- Revising the prevention goal to only include routine physicals, cancer screenings and immunizations based on age/gender.

- Integrated blood pressure, cholesterol and vision screenings into the annual biometric screening appointments conducted at the onsite H&W center; 95% of employees and spouses completed the biometrics and became eligible for reduced medical insurance premiums.

Current Vaccination Strategy

For COVID-specific vaccinations, we hosted eight-company/county-wide vaccine clinics onsite and invited all employees, spouses and eligible dependents, as eligible.

- For the annual flu vaccinations, we offer onsite flu clinics with the onsite H&W centers being available afterwards for those unable to attend the clinic dates.
- We directed the onsite H&W center staff, TPA representatives and Navigation Services Staff to review an individual's vaccine record and recommend immunizations, during any

routine contact with the service representative. During the visits/calls, patients are reminded that vaccinations can be completed conveniently at the onsite H&W center or through their PCP.

- Participation in all onsite vaccinations and clinics is offered on a voluntary basis (there are no mandatory vaccine requirements).

Strategy Success

- Quantitative results: It's early to have results, and as 2030 goals just started in 2021. The baseline completion rate is 59%.
- Qualitative results: We've received stories from employees and spouses about how appreciative they are of the onsite vaccination services offered, along with the onsite H&W center services available.

- Lessons learned/recommendations for other employers include:
 - Make sure to align all vendor partners to your goals – leveraging their individual and collective services/programs.
 - Ensure you can integrate the data across all vendor partners to comprehensively measure your program results over time.



Employer Action Steps

Employers can play an important role in improving the health of the communities where we live and work by facilitating increased vaccination rates among our covered population. While the number and order of these action steps will vary by employer, the following have proven to be effective:

Look at Your Data

- An important first step is to work with your carriers and others to analyze medical and prescription drug claims to help you understand vaccination

rates in your population, validate needed improvements and identify which member segments and vaccines need the most immediate attention.

- Use the results of this analysis to determine the amount of time and resources needed to address vaccination rates that may be lagging.
- Set your targets and track progress.

Outreach & Integration

- Worksite services: Make vaccinations part of your onsite wellbeing program by offering flu shot clinics and/or using onsite health/wellness/medical centers.
- Allow employees to receive onsite vaccinations while they are on the clock.
- Offsite services: Help remote workers or those who choose to get services offsite know how to use their medical and prescription drug benefits to get free vaccinations.
- Consider offering employees paid time off for offsite vaccinations (and include potential recovery time).
- Hold regularly scheduled activities for both worksite and offsite workers to

provide convenient and easy access to vaccination clinics.

- Offer vouchers to direct employees to the Public Health Department, their primary care physician or local pharmacies.
- For vaccine hesitant populations, use multiple communication strategies to engage them.
- Encourage leaders to participate in and promote vaccination campaigns as a preventive health strategy.
- Notify your partners – carriers, TPAs, wellness vendors, point solution providers – that vaccination is a key priority for your organization.
- Ask these partners how they can support your efforts to fill knowledge gaps and conduct proactive outreach to encourage employees to get vaccinations they may not have yet received.
- Hold town halls and expert-led sessions to share information about the value and safety of vaccinations.



Employee/Member Communications

- Use simple, positive jargon-free language, especially when covering complex topics such as side effects and safety.
- Listen and show respect and empathy when responding to people's concerns.
- Meet your members where they are — learn their values, needs, emotions and level of knowledge while connecting with them in a way that is authentic and respectful.
- Emphasize stories over statistics and use personal narratives to emphasize why vaccination is important.
- Educate members about the importance of vaccinations as a part of their preventive care.
- Be ready to adapt messaging as circumstances change.
- Tailor messages to specific target audiences to address varying [literacy levels](#).
- Translate written materials for non-English speaking populations.
- Clearly communicate who is eligible to participate in worksite and offsite vaccination programs.
- Determine how members want to receive information to ensure you are reaching them in the most effective ways – e.g., work or personal email, text message or phone, social media posts.
- Consider sharing information about vaccination disparities with employee resource groups to encourage vaccinations.
- Promote “immunity through vaccinations” as a health goal at employee health fairs.
- Emphasize the importance of vaccination schedules when members speak with their physician during annual wellness check-ups.
- Provide information about which vaccines require a physician's prescription.
- Leverage technology to promote vaccinations, such as convenient “smart” scheduling.
- Ask vaccinated employees to serve as ambassadors and share their story; personal stories from trusted messengers are often more effective than statistics.
- Ensure the organization's leaders are provided with guidance on how to “lead by example” and share their stories.



Through continual education related to vaccines, we are pleased to report that employee participation and engagement have increased.



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BOLD SOLUTIONS FOR HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES.

LANGUAGE THAT WORKS TO IMPROVE VACCINE ACCEPTANCE Communications Cheat Sheet

TIPS



TAILOR YOUR MESSAGE FOR YOUR AUDIENCE. *Americans' perceptions about vaccines and their safety differ by political party, race, age, and geography.*



EXPLAIN THE BENEFITS OF GETTING VACCINATED, NOT JUST THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT DOING IT. *Say, “Getting the vaccine will keep you and your family safe,” rather than calling it “the right thing to do.” Focus on the need to return to normal and reopen the economy.*



TALK ABOUT THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE VACCINE. *Refer to the scientists, the health and medical experts, and the researchers – not the science, health, and pharmaceutical companies.*



AVOID JUDGMENTAL LANGUAGE WHEN TALKING ABOUT OR TO PEOPLE WHO ARE CONCERNED. *Acknowledge their concern or skepticism and offer to answer their questions.*



USE (AND REPEAT) THE WORD “EVERY” TO EXPLAIN THE VACCINE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS. *For example: “Every study, every phase, and every trial was reviewed by the FDA and a safety board.”*

Use These Words MORE:

The benefits of taking it
Getting the vaccine will keep you safe
A return to normal
Your family
Medical experts
Research
Medical researchers
Damage from lockdowns
A transparent, rigorous process
Safety
Pharmaceutical companies
Advanced/groundbreaking
Vaccination
America's leading experts
Skeptical/concerned about the vaccine

Use These Words LESS:

The consequences of not taking it
Getting the vaccine is the right thing to do
Predictability/certainty
Your community
Scientists/health experts
Discover/create/invent
Drug companies
Inability to travel easily and safely
The dollars spent; number of participants
Security
Drug companies
Historic
Injection/inoculation
The world's leading experts
Misled/confused about the vaccine



Health Benefits Plan Design

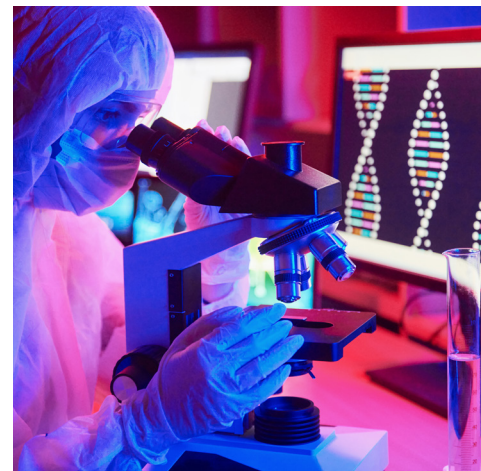
- Institute a \$0 copay for all vaccinations, as recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP); see CDC resources below.
- Ensure that members know they don't have to pay for preventive vaccines covered by their health plan and provide them with a list of fully covered vaccines.
- Consider providing incentives to members who obtain recommended vaccinations – i.e. waived copays or a cash reward.
- Ensure that recommended vaccines are covered under both the medical and the pharmacy benefits; this will eliminate confusion and delays at the site of care.



Future of Vaccines

Current innovations in technology are driving the future of health care. [In the last few years](#), there have been key advances in the field of vaccinations. Traditionally, vaccines have taken over a decade to research, develop and be confirmed as safe for use in humans. For years, scientists have recognized that this process is not fast enough to respond to novel infectious diseases. When COVID-19 became a global pandemic, scientists were under immense pressure to develop a new vaccine in a short timeframe. Before 2020, the fastest development of a vaccine had been the four years it took to get the mumps vaccine approved in the 1960s. What was achieved with the COVID-19 vaccine demonstrates a paradigm shift in vaccine development and deployment. It shows how vaccines can be rapidly and effectively developed to respond to novel diseases.

[It is predicted](#) that future vaccines will become more tailored based on a person's age, underlying medical conditions and even the likelihood of responding to vaccination with a better immune response. Universal vaccines against all strains of influenza and all variants of SARS-CoV-2 are also in development.



Therapeutic vaccines are a promising area of research, as scientists explore ways of training the body's immune system to respond to cancer, diabetes and dementia. With science moving quickly, education will become increasingly important for doctors, nurses, pharmacists and others on the frontline of vaccine delivery.

Employers can use these rapid advances to support employees and families. It is vital to revisit your organization's vaccination strategy on a regular basis and update the strategy when needed. Employers must also engage carriers, vendor partners and others to support vaccination efforts and develop an effective strategy to communicate the value of vaccines to covered populations. Confidence in getting vaccinated can drive a healthier workforce and community at large.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

Vaccines & Immunizations

- [Immunization: The Basics](#)
- [Basics and Common Questions](#)
- [Vaccines and Preventable Diseases](#)
- [Adult Vaccination Resources](#)
- [Vaccines for Your Children](#)
- [The Adult Vaccine Assessment Tool](#)
- [ACIP Vaccine Recommendations | CDC](#)

Vaccination Schedules

- [Reasons to Follow CDC's Immunization Schedule | CDC](#)
- [Vaccine Schedule for Children 6 Years or Younger | CDC](#)
- [Recommended Vaccinations for Children 7 to 18 Years Old, Parent-Friendly Version \(cdc.gov\)](#)
- [Adult Vaccination | CDC](#)
- [Vaccines During and After Pregnancy | CDC](#)

COVID 19

- [Communication Resources for COVID-19 Vaccines | CDC](#)
- [Stay Up to Date with COVID-19 Vaccines Including Boosters | CDC](#)

Kaiser Family Foundation

[Coverage of Preventive Care by Private Health Plans Required Under the Affordable Care Act](#)

Vaccinate Your Family

[Questions About Vaccines](#)

- How Vaccines Work
- Vaccine Safety
- Vaccine Side Effects
- Vaccine Schedules
- Vaccine Research

[Vaccination Resources for the Public](#)

- Resources to help address vaccine misinformation online
- Credible websites for vaccine information
- How do we know vaccines are safe?
- Video FAQs
- Adult and childhood immunization schedules

ImmUNITY Chicago

[How routine vaccines can help protect you, your family, and your community](#)

- What are routine vaccines
- What are vaccine preventable diseases
- Why should I get routine vaccines
- Are vaccines safe
- Do vaccines have side effects
- Can I still get sick if I'm vaccinated
- Which vaccines do I need
- Where can I get routine vaccines
- How can I get help paying for vaccines

[Make a Vaccination Plan](#)

- Find out which vaccines you may need
- Find a place to get vaccinated and make an appointment
- Plan how to get there
- Prepare for your appointment
- Help spread the word



Creating a Vaccination-Friendly Culture

In the summer of 2022, Northeast Business Group on Health (NEBGH)



[surveyed](#) 103 employers to gather information about their vaccination practices and perspectives. This led to the November, 2022 launch of [Creating a Vaccine-Friendly Culture](#). This comprehensive guide outlines steps employers can take to promoting vaccines, communicating the importance of vaccination as essential to good health and wellbeing, and increasing vaccination rates in employee populations and beyond.

Click on the resources below for more information.

- [Detailed Actions for Employers: Creating a Vaccination-Friendly Culture](#)
- [Checklist of Action Steps](#)
- [Adult Immunization Schedule](#)

Additional Resources

[1 Herd Immunity: Strength in Numbers | National Geographic Society](#)

[2 Vaccines for Children \(VFC\): Protecting Children | CDC](#)

[3 Vaccination Coverage with Selected Vaccines and Exemption Rates Among Children in Kindergarten — United States, 2020–21 School Year | MMWR \(cdc.gov\)](#)

[4 Opinion | Covid Isn't the Only Reason Children's Vaccination Rates Are Falling - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)

[5 Herd Immunity: Strength in Numbers | National Geographic Society](#)

[6 Vaccination Coverage with Selected Vaccines and Exemption Rates Among Children in Kindergarten — United States, 2020–21 School Year | MMWR \(cdc.gov\)](#)

[7 Estimated Influenza Illnesses, Medical visits, and Hospitalizations Prevented by Vaccination in the United States — 2019–2020 Influenza Season | CDC](#)

[8 Influenza Vaccination Coverage, Adults \(cdc.gov\)](#)

About MBGH

MBGH is one of the nation's leading and largest non-profit employer coalitions. Members are represented by human resources and health benefit professionals for over 150 mid, large and jumbo self-insured public and private companies who provide health benefits for over 4 million lives. Employer members spend over \$15 billion annually on health care. Since 1980, members have used their collective voice to serve as catalysts to improve the cost, quality and safety of health care benefits.

mbgh.org

Click on more information about MBGH below.

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Power
of MBGH



MBGH
Members



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Employer
Resources



Employer
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Activities

