

COVID-19 Vaccination FAQs for Employers (Non-Healthcare Settings)

Common questions and answers about COVID-19 vaccination from employers in workplace settings:

1. Can employers require COVID-19 vaccines for their workforce?

Yes. You may choose to require the COVID-19 vaccine for your staff.

In addition, per [Proclamation 20-05](#), Washington state currently requires a COVID-19 vaccine for [cabinet agency state employees](#), health care workers and long-term care workers, and employees in educational settings, (public and private K-12 school, childcare, early learning, and higher education (the order does not apply to state-tribal education compact schools or to students)).

These employees are required to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 (at least two weeks after finishing the vaccine series) by October 18, 2021. The requirement includes contractors, volunteers, and any other positions that work in these settings. Employers will need to verify vaccination status of all employees.

If you require employees to provide proof of COVID-19 vaccination from a pharmacy or healthcare provider, you should know that you cannot mandate that the employee provide any further medical information as part of their proof. The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) cannot give legal advice. If you decide to have a COVID-19 vaccine policy, please consult with your legal counsel.

For more information, please visit:

- [Vaccine Mandate Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- Washington DOH [Resources and Recommendations](#) for Businesses
- Washington Labor & Industries (L&I) [COVID-19 Vaccines and Paid Sick Leave Common Questions](#)
- Centers for Disease Control (CDC) [Workplace Vaccination Program](#) guidance section on Vaccine Mandates & Exemptions

2. Do workers have to test negative for COVID-19 before they get a COVID vaccine?

NO. A negative COVID-19 test is NOT required for vaccination with ANY COVID-19 vaccine. However, symptom screenings should be conducted before anyone receives a COVID-19 vaccine, and people who have a fever or other COVID-19 symptoms should be advised to seek COVID-19 testing and then isolate at home. The sick worker can get vaccinated after:

- A. Their symptoms have resolved or
- B. They received a positive test result, completed their COVID-19 [isolation](#) period, and their symptoms have resolved. Any worker who has severe COVID-19 or injectable or intravenous medications for COVID-19 (such as monoclonal antibodies) should check with their health care provider before receiving a COVID-19 vaccine, because certain treatments for severe COVID-19 may require a longer waiting period before getting a vaccine.

3. [Some of my employees have already had COVID-19. Do they still need to get vaccinated?](#)

Yes, the Advisory Committee on immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends anyone who previously had COVID-19 to get the vaccine.

If employees previously had COVID-19, they are still recommended to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Data shows it is uncommon to be re-infected with COVID-19 in the 90 days after infection, so they might have some protection (called natural immunity). However, we don't know how long natural immunity might last.

Employees who **currently** have COVID-19 should wait to get vaccinated until they feel better and their [isolation](#) period is finished, if possible.

Employees who were recently exposed to COVID-19 should also wait to get the vaccine until after their [quarantine](#) period, if they can safely quarantine away from other people. If there is a high risk that they could infect others, they may be vaccinated during their quarantine period to prevent spreading the disease.

4. [Can we ease workplace restrictions like masking and distancing after employees are vaccinated?](#)

NO. The COVID-19 vaccines work well, but they are not 100 percent effective. Some people may get COVID-19 even if they've been vaccinated. Vaccine studies focused mainly on whether the vaccine keeps you from getting seriously ill or dying from COVID-19. We don't yet know to what degree getting a COVID-19 vaccine will prevent someone from spreading the virus that causes COVID-19 to other people. Until we know more, [all employees should continue to:](#)

- Wear masks as required by the [statewide mandate](#) and Secretary of Health's [order](#)
- Stay at least 6 feet (or 2 meters) away from others when possible
- Avoid crowded and poorly ventilated spaces
- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Wash hands often
- Monitor their health daily and stay home when sick
- Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces
- Keep WA Notify enabled

The more contact the employees have with one another (or members of the public they may interact with at work), the more likely they are to be exposed to COVID-19. Workplace health and safety measures, such as barriers to separate workers, changes in employee

movement at the work site, staggering of worker shifts, or other protective measures should remain in place for now.

In addition, workplace [symptom screening](#) for employees should still continue, and if any workers present to work with fever or other [symptoms of COVID-19](#), they should be sent home from work and advised to seek testing for COVID-19.

For more information, visit the DOH Guidance for Businesses and Organizations (non-health care) and the CDC Guidance for Businesses and Employers Responding to COVID-19.

5. Can COVID-19 outbreaks still occur in at work even if all employees are vaccinated?

YES. It is possible that outbreaks in the workplace could still happen, even if all workers are vaccinated against COVID-19. Employers should continue [symptom screening](#) for all workers and send workers home from work if they have fever or other [COVID-19 symptoms](#).

If a workplace has a regular testing program to screen for COVID-19 in workers, employers should continue screening testing.

- Businesses should notify their [local health jurisdiction](#) (LHJ) of ANY cases of COVID-19 in the workplace. As required in the Governor's proclamation 20-25, employers must notify their LHJ if they are aware of two or more employees that develop confirmed or suspected COVID-19 within a 14-day period.
- Employers with more than 50 employees at a workplace or worksite are required to report to L&I within 24 hours of confirming 10 or more of their employees at the workplace or worksite in Washington have tested positive for COVID-19 ([SB 5115](#)).

For more information about symptom screening and investigating outbreaks of COVID-19 in the workplace, please see the DOH [Guidance for Daily COVID-19 Symptom Screening of Staff and Guests](#) and DOH [Case Investigations and Contact Tracing](#) page.

6. Our workplace would like to help our employees get COVID-19 vaccines. What can we do?

Employers can help their employees by either hosting a clinic or encouraging vaccination offsite in the community. Find out how in our [COVID-19 Vaccines Toolkit for Businesses and Employers](#).

7. What should employers know about post-vaccination side effects?

After getting vaccinated, some people might have some side effects, which are normal and a sign that the body is building protection against COVID-19.

It's a good idea to stagger vaccination schedules for employees to avoid worker shortages due to vaccine side effects. Most side effects are mild (tiredness, headache, and muscle pain) and last one to two days. However, some people may get a fever and need to miss work. For vaccines that need two doses, side effects are often worse after the second dose. You may want to distribute [this visual guide](#) to employees so they can understand what symptoms are a reaction to the vaccine, or actual COVID-19 illness.

Tips and Considerations:

- Schedule the vaccine clinic on a Friday if your company is on a Monday to Friday schedule.
- Encourage employees to get the vaccine before their scheduled days off.
- Stagger vaccination for employees in the same job category or area of a facility.
- Encourage employees who have a fever to stay home from work.

For more information, please visit the [COVID-19 Vaccines Toolkit for Businesses and Employers](#).

8. Some of our employees have received vaccinations in other countries prior to starting work here. Are other vaccines permissible in Washington State?

Yes. The CDC considers [anyone vaccinated with an FDA-authorized or WHO-listed vaccine to be fully vaccinated](#). For information on vaccines authorized in the United States, please see the CDC's [Different COVID-19 Vaccines](#).

9. What should I do if I have more vaccine-specific questions?

For additional questions related to COVID-19 vaccination and your workforce, contact:

- vaccine.engagement@doh.wa.gov or
- Your [local health jurisdiction](#)

This guidance may be updated periodically as new information becomes available.

More COVID-19 Information and Resources

Stay up-to-date on the [current COVID-19 situation in Washington](#), [Governor Inslee's proclamations](#), [symptoms](#), [how it spreads](#), and [how and when people should get tested](#). See our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information.

A person's race/ethnicity or nationality does not, itself, put them at greater risk of COVID-19. However, data are revealing that communities of color are being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. This is due to the effects of racism, and in particular, structural racism, that leaves some groups with fewer opportunities to protect themselves and their communities. [Stigma will not help to fight the illness](#). Share only accurate information to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- [WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [WA State Coronavirus Response \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Find Your Local Health Department or District](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Stigma Reduction Resources](#)

Have more questions? Call our COVID-19 Information hotline: **1-800-525-0127**

Monday – 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., Tuesday – Sunday and [observed state holidays](#), 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language**. For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact a health care provider.

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 ([Washington Relay](#)) or email civil.rights@doh.wa.gov.