



U.S. Small Business
Administration

Small Business Guide

Strengthening Workplace Vaccination & Safety in Response to
the Delta Variant

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Introduction

As a small business owner, you've shouldered a disproportionate economic burden during the pandemic—Getting back to life—back to seeing our loved ones, back to school, and back to business—requires that we turn the tide against COVID-19. Vaccines offer hope and protection that can help our country and our economy rebuild and recover.

We're on our way, but significant challenges remain, including the emergence of a highly transmissible Delta variant that's driving a new wave of infections across the country. Public health officials warn that we must encourage many more Americans to get vaccinated, including more than 80 million people in the United States who are currently eligible for vaccines but remain unvaccinated and at real risk.

On November 4, the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued emergency [COVID-19 rules](#) for roughly 116,000 private businesses with 100 or more employees firm or company-wide, a sweeping new measure that's designed to protect 84 million workers on the job. Those rules—currently on hold, pending a legal challenge in federal court—require businesses to prove that they are requiring vaccination or weekly testing for COVID-19 by January 4, 2022, with exceptions only for people with a medical disability or religious accommodation. Beginning December 6, 2021, employers will also be required to offer workers paid time off for vaccination and recovery from possible side effects, as well as require unvaccinated workers to wear face coverings at the workplace.

Even while OSHA is blocked from implementing its rules—and even if those rules don't apply to your business—employers are encouraged to take action to provide the safest possible workplace for their employees and customers.

This guide is designed to help you:

1. **Communicate** with employees, workers and customers about the safety and benefits of COVID-19 vaccines and reinforce the importance of masking and other safety measures to prevent the spread.
2. **Make a plan** to require or encourage your workers to get vaccinated at their earliest opportunity. This could include offering paid time off, transportation credits, childcare or small incentives to workers who choose to get vaccinated.
3. **Strengthen** vaccination efforts in your community by offering help to public health departments, nonprofit organizations and others involved in the vaccine response.

This guide includes:

- Tips and tools for small business owners
- Easy-to-use resources
- Action steps to get started

Communicate About Vaccines

As a small business owner, the most important thing you can do to help turn the tide against COVID-19 is communicate with your employees, workers and customers about the benefits and safety of COVID-19 vaccines.

Key Vaccine Messages

It's important to use trusted, fact-based messages from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other public health partners. Here are some messages you can consider:

- **COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective.**

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. Vaccines teach your immune system how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19.

- **COVID-19 vaccines can help us get back to the things we love.**

We all want to get back to our lives. Vaccinations can help us get back too many of the things we miss most, like spending time with loved ones and friends, traveling and going to events. They'll help keep you from getting COVID-19, reduce hospitalizations and save lives.

- **Get vaccinated at your earliest opportunity.**

Everyone ages 5 and older is now eligible to receive free COVID-19 vaccines, regardless of immigration status. You don't need health insurance to get a free vaccine.

- **COVID-19 vaccines provide hope, but we need to continue following public health guidelines to prevent the spread.**

In response to the Delta variant, CDC now [recommends](#) that everyone (including fully vaccinated individuals) should wear a mask in public indoor settings in [areas with substantial or high](#) COVID-19 transmission. Many counties across the U.S. are experiencing either “substantial” or “high” transmission rates that call for indoor mask-wearing, according to CDC.

- **It is okay to have questions about vaccines.**

We want to make sure you have access to trusted information in order to make decisions about vaccines for yourself and your family. If you have questions about whether vaccines are right for you, talk to your doctor or healthcare provider.

Options for Small Businesses

As a small business owner, you have lots of ways to communicate with your employees and customers. Here are some strategies you might consider:

- Send an email or home mailer sharing facts about COVID-19 vaccines.
- Organize a staff meeting, one-on-one, or small-group discussions to share facts from trusted sources and to hear concerns. A Conversation Guide is available to help you engage your employees and workers.
- Use your company newsletter or social media channels to share trusted information about vaccines. Here’s sample [newsletter content](#) and [social media tools](#) from the CDC to help guide your outreach.
- Invite vaccinated employees and workers to share their positive vaccine experience during a staff meeting or via a company newsletter or email.
- Post workplace [flyers](#) or utilize in-store [radio announcements](#) and [PSAs](#) to reinforce the safety and benefits of COVID-19 vaccines.
- Invite a local physician or other public health expert to speak with your employees and workers about vaccines.
- Lead by example. Make sure you get vaccinated and let your employees and workers know you did so. Create a safer work environment for your workers and

customers by requiring everyone to wear masks in public indoor settings in [areas of substantial or high transmission](#) of COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status.

Supporting Employees with Additional Questions

People who are unvaccinated may have additional questions or need extra support before making their decision about vaccines.

Here are some ways you can help:

- **Acknowledge that it's ok to have questions.** As an employer, your role is to make sure your workers feel supported. Don't try to "convince" employees or "change their mind" about vaccines. Instead, offer trusted information and encourage employees to speak with their doctor or healthcare provider.
- **Understand that some groups may have unique experiences and concerns.** Black, Hispanic, Asian-American, American Indian, and Alaska Native communities have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and have experienced higher rates of hospitalization, severe illness, and death.
- **Lead with empathy.** If you're not a member of a disproportionately impacted group, it's helpful to learn more about why these inequities exist and how they might contribute to additional questions about vaccines. You can support employees by acknowledging the deep historical traumas and structural inequalities that lead to poorer health outcomes and contribute to greater mistrust.
- **Create a safe, supportive workplace culture.** As a small business owner, you can cultivate an environment where all workers feel supported by listening without judgment and creating space for questions. Understand that no community shares all of the same beliefs, perceptions, and concerns. Every individual is unique, and every employee deserves to have their questions answered before deciding about vaccines.
- **Identify local groups or resources who can help.** Many nonprofit organizations, public health departments, churches, cities, and states are hosting events and launching initiatives to educate and engage diverse

communities about vaccines. These offer great opportunities to connect your employees to events and initiatives that reflect their unique needs.

Three Steps to Getting Started

It's important to begin communicating about vaccines now. Here are three things you can do right away:

- 1. Share with your employees** the reasons why COVID-19 vaccines are important to you. Be honest, open, and authentic. Lead by example and share about your positive vaccine experience.
- 2. Communicate your intention** to create a workplace environment where all employees feel supported. Create an “open door” policy that invites workers to share questions and ask for help getting the information they need to decide about vaccines.
- 3. Provide information** about where vaccines are available in your community. Search [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov), text your ZIP code to 438829, or call 1-800-232-0233 to find locations near you. Remind workers that vaccines are free and available to everyone in the United States ages 12 and older, regardless of immigration status. You don't need health insurance to get a COVID-19 vaccine.

Encourage or Require Vaccination

A fully vaccinated workforce creates the safest possible workplace environment for employees and customers. It may also be the most equitable policy, especially if the alternative is regular testing, paid for by your workers.

Many small businesses have announced policies to require vaccinations for all or part of their workforce, adding to the millions of federal workers now required to show proof of vaccination. Businesses with over 100 workers will soon be obligated to require vaccination or weekly testing from employees.

If a vaccination requirement is not an option for your small business, we recommend these steps:

- **Routine Testing:** Require all workers and regular visitors (not retail customers) to be [routinely screened](#) with a rapid test, at least weekly. Repeated negative tests provide a high degree of certainty that the individual is not infectious. Beginning January 4, 2022, testing at least weekly is required for employers of 100 or more workers who do not have a COVID-19 vaccination requirement.
- **Proof of Vaccination:** Allow anyone who provides proof of full vaccination (accounting for the appropriate time period after the final vaccine) to bypass the routine testing requirement.
- **Support Workers:** Employers are encouraged to provide paid time off for vaccinations and recovery from possible side effects—which is required for employers of 100 or more workers beginning December 6, 2021. Businesses should extend this support to working parents who choose to vaccinate eligible children, too. Consider organizing [on-site vaccination clinics](#) for workers and families, or offering transportation support, childcare or incentives to improve access to vaccines.
- **Mask Use:** Require masks for all employees and customers, regardless of vaccination status, in [areas with substantial or high transmission](#).

Additional Ways to Support Workers

Research has shown that there are additional ways small businesses can support or incentivize workers to get vaccinated. Small businesses may not be able to afford all, or even some, of these proposed actions. These are intended to provide examples of ways you might consider supporting employees and workers, to the extent you are able.

- Cover **out-of-pocket expenses** associated with vaccination. This could include offering an Uber or Lyft gift card for transportation, a small stipend for lunch or reimbursement for childcare.
- Extend benefits and support to your **entire workforce**, including temporary, part-time or contract workers.
- Help **identify where workers can get vaccinated**. Search [vaccines.gov](#), text your ZIP code to 438829, or call 1-800-232-0233 to find locations near you. Vaccines are

widely available at more than 80,000 locations across the country, including over 40,000 retail pharmacies. Ninety percent of Americans live within 5 miles of a vaccine site.

- Offer **internet access** or **language support services** to help employees and workers schedule appointments.
- Some small businesses may be able to partner with a local public health department or other providers to offer **on-site vaccinations** to employees and workers, even during late shifts.
- Consider providing small prizes, rewards, or other **modest financial incentives** (i.e., gift cards, coupons, tokens, etc.) to employees and customers who get vaccinated.
- **Remind employees** that vaccines are free and available to everyone in the United States ages 5 and older, regardless of immigration status. You don't need health insurance to get a COVID-19 vaccine.

Strengthen Vaccine Distribution in Your Community

Delivering and administering hundreds of millions of COVID-19 vaccinations represents one of the greatest communications, logistical and public health challenges in our country's history. There are many ways your small business might support local vaccination efforts and contribute to a faster recovery.

Options for Small Businesses

- **Lead by example.** As a trusted leader in your community, you can encourage other small businesses to share facts about the safety and benefits of vaccines; offer paid time off to workers for vaccine appointments and recovery, including to attend vaccine appointments with eligible children; and align workplace safety protocols with the latest public health guidance.
- Encourage your local chamber of commerce or rotary club to host an **educational conversation** on the role of small businesses in the vaccine response, and volunteer to share what you've learned.

- Encourage your customers to get vaccinated by offering special **coupons, discounts,** or other **incentives.**
- Share vaccine facts on your **product packaging** or post [educational flyers](#) at your **place of business.**
- Contact your [local public health department](#) to help address other needs, including transportation, childcare, language support or other services that may help improve access and remove barriers to vaccination in your community.

Tools and Resources

Tools, templates, and communications resources are available to help you engage employees, workers, customers, and other stakeholders, including:

- Vaccine Conversation Guide for Managers
- Quick Start Guide – Covid-19 Workplace
- CDC: [COVID-19 Vaccine Resources](#) and [Communications Resources](#)
- U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration [COVID-19 Guidance by Industry](#)