

Equity Principles for Workplace COVID-19 Vaccine Policies & Safety Practices

The Vaccine Equity Now! Coalition strongly encourages every eligible person to receive a COVID-19 vaccine to create the safest possible environment for employees.

This resource was developed to support the equitable implementation of workplace COVID-19 vaccine policies and safety practices. **The following principles are informed by the historical and present day context of racial and social inequities that were perpetuated and exacerbated by the pandemic and the state's vaccine rollout.**

Despite the deep systemic issues in the rollout of the vaccine in Massachusetts, we have the opportunity to connect employees and their families with safe, effective, and free COVID-19 vaccines. Employers have a key role in supporting health education and partnering with trusted messengers to get employees and their families vaccinated.



Health & Wealth

A steady job in a safe working environment is more than just a paycheck—employment provides benefits and stability critical for maintaining good mental and physical health for both employees and families alike ([learn more](#)). Therefore, employers in both the public and private sectors must do all they can to promote a safe and healthy working environment and ensure their employees can continue working their usual paid schedule by offering alternative and flexible work arrangements or free on-site COVID-19 testing.

Employee Engagement

Innovative and equitable practices do not simply implement COVID-19 vaccine and safety policies, but actively seek employee participation to develop them. Developing health and safety policies in a collaborative environment will lead to better compliance and outcomes, whether or not the work site is covered by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and state or occupational requirements.

- Approaches to engagement should be open, honest, and inclusive. Employees should be provided with meaningful opportunities to contribute to the planning, development, and implementation of COVID-19 vaccine policies.
- Employers must recognize that different workforce populations have unique questions, concerns, and access needs. Employers should create spaces to listen to and understand employees' questions and concerns, while ensuring that diverse voices and perspectives are represented.
- Employees should have access to information that is accurate and easy to understand, in the languages spoken by the workforce. Employees should have sufficient time to consider the information and offer input throughout the process.
- Employees should be provided with reasons for the final policy proposal and information about how employee input was incorporated.
- Throughout the process, employers should keep all employees informed of the proposed policies, their implications, and any changes or regulatory requirements.

Comprehensive Approach

Vaccination is the best method to combat COVID-19, but vaccine policies must be part of a comprehensive, multi-layered approach that must also include:

▪ Educational events and resources

- Employers should partner with trusted community organizations to host on-site events for employees and their families to learn about the safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccine(s), have all their questions answered, and receive their vaccine together ([learn more](#)).
- Educational events should be conducted on paid time and in the languages spoken by the workforce. Employers should offer additional sessions at a time when families are most likely to attend.
- Employers should clearly define and communicate the process for requesting religious or medical exemptions to employees in the languages spoken by the workforce. Further, to protect employees' personal health information, the individual(s) reviewing exemption requests should be adequately trained or have clinical experience, including confidentiality training.
- Employers should be aware of the increased need for mental health services, and provide employee benefits or connect employees to community resources.

▪ Paid sick leave

- Employers should offer paid sick leave to employees for COVID-related sickness, exposure, quarantine, caregiving, vaccination, and to recover from side effects. This recommendation is broader than the requirements of the federal and state COVID-19 Temporary Sick Leave Program and should be kept in place for the duration of the pandemic ([learn more](#)).
- Emergency paid sick leave must be job-protected, meaning that employees cannot be fired or penalized for using it and it should come out of a different bank than an employee's earned paid time off.

▪ COVID-19 vaccination

- Employers should host vaccination clinics for employees and their families, partnering with local boards of health and community health centers.
- Vaccination clinics should be conducted on paid time and must offer interpretation and information in languages spoken by the workforce.
- If unable to host an on-site vaccination clinic, employers should support employees in scheduling their vaccine appointments and consider offering a transportation voucher or other small incentives to reduce barriers for employees who want to get vaccinated.

▪ COVID-19 mitigation and prevention measures

- Employers should take all possible measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, including providing proper ventilation and air filtration ([learn more](#)), social distancing, mandatory mask wearing indoors for employees and the public when transmission rates are substantial or high, COVID-19 workplace health and safety training in employees' preferred language, routine COVID-19 testing, confidential and rapid contact tracing and notification of close contacts, alternative work arrangements, personal protective equipment (as needed, provided by the employer) and vaccination.
- Employers should provide free on-site COVID-19 testing for those employees who have been exposed to COVID-19 and who are not or cannot get vaccinated.
- Regular testing, paid for by the employer, at a minimum of once every seven days, should be conducted in lieu of vaccination for those who are not or cannot be vaccinated, if permitted in the industry.
- Employers should arrange alternative working arrangements to keep employees working until they are comfortable receiving the vaccine, during periods of quarantine, or if they are providing care for vulnerable loved ones.



Additional Resources

Resources for employers to update or create more equitable policies:

- Find Vaccine location near you: <https://vaxfinder.mass.gov/> or call 2-1-1 (more than 100 languages available)
- COVID-19 Mobile Vaccination Programs: [Visit or Host a Mobile Pop-up Clinic, or Schedule In-Home Vaccination](#)
- Migrant Clinicians Network: [The COVID-19 Vaccine and Migrant, Immigrant, and Food & Farm Worker Patient](#)
- Vaccines @ Work: [Impact Form - Become a Vaccine Champion](#)
- National Resource Center for Refugees, Immigrants, and Migrants (NRC-RIM): [Best Practices for Employee Communication Around COVID-19 Vaccines](#)
- Health Action Alliance: [Sample COVID-19 Vaccination Policy](#), Responding to Requests for [Medical Exemptions](#) and [Religious Exemptions](#), Sample Request for [Medical Exemption](#) and [Religious Exemption](#), [Business Action on Childhood Vaccinations](#)
- The National Center for Safe & Supportive Learning Environments: [Resources for All Levels of Early Education Through Higher Education](#)

About the VEN Coalition

The Vaccine Equity Now! Coalition is composed of more than 30 racial justice, immigrant justice, civil rights, and public health organizations and elected officials. Together, we are committed to advocating for vaccine equity in Massachusetts.

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COALITION**