

# HR Insights

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## Attraction and Retention Amid President Biden's Vaccine Mandates

Attracting and retaining top talent is always a top challenge facing employers. With the COVID-19 pandemic, employers have had to navigate a tight labor market while supporting employees and adapting to local COVID-19 regulations. And soon, some employers may be subject to President Joe Biden's vaccine mandates, which can further complicate employee relations and talent acquisition efforts.

Biden recently directed the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to draft a new emergency rule requiring businesses with 100 or more employees to ensure workers are either fully vaccinated or tested for COVID-19 weekly.

This article provides an overview of the impending rule, talent market implications and employer considerations for employee attraction and retention.

### Overview of the Rule

The new rule comes shortly after the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine was fully approved for use by the Food and Drug Administration, enabling the White House to fight the pandemic more aggressively. The OSHA emergency rule—which is expected to take effect in the coming weeks—will reportedly also require large employers to provide their workers with paid time off to get vaccinated and recover from any vaccination-related side effects.

### Impact on Labor Market

Notably, while this rule impacts around two-thirds of private-sector employees, it does only impact around 2.5% of private-sector employers, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. However, that small percentage of companies employ the overwhelming majority of U.S. workers, impacting as many as 80 million Americans.

Employee beliefs will vary greatly, so employers need a pulse on their workforce's concerns. As such, Qualtrics conducted a survey with U.S. employees about vaccine mandates in March 2021 and again recently after plans for a federal mandate were announced. Consider the following findings:

- More than half (60%) of employees say they'd support their current employers if they require vaccination before returning to work. In March, that number was a bit higher at 66%.
- Nearly a quarter (23%) of employees would strongly consider leaving their place of work if their employers mandated vaccines, compared with 19% in March.
- About half (57%) of employees would feel safe going back to work without a vaccine mandate, while 24% would feel unsafe in the workplace without a vaccine mandate.



Undoubtedly, there will be mixed opinions on the vaccine mandate, but large employers will have to comply with OSHA's guidance or could be subject to fines.

The talent market may continue to adapt or shift, as we've seen since the start of the pandemic. As the talent market develops and employees process what this rule means, there are some general issues for small and large employers to consider.

## Considerations for Employers

This rule will not directly impact all businesses. But regardless of company size, employers will continue to face employee attraction and recruitment challenges due to the pandemic and, now, vaccine mandates.

Amid the release of OSHA's rule, employers can start planning today and revamp their talent strategies to win over and keep more employees.

### *Prepare for Mixed Opinions*

As mentioned, employment surveys reveal that some employees may quit their jobs if faced with a workplace mandate, but don't assume that the general employee feedback will be negative. In many cases, employees are on board—and being part of a vaccinated workforce could be a desire of current and future employees who desire safety.

If unsure about their workforce's sentiment, employers could use a survey to discover how employees feel about workplace vaccine mandates. A survey won't change the rules and how it applies, but it can help employers understand where their employees stand and how they can best communicate and address employee needs. Employers could even find out that most of their workforce favors vaccination and then focus on making vaccine-hesitant employees feel heard and understood.

Once employers know how their workforce feels about impending vaccine mandates, updating their vaccination communication strategy is essential to retaining employees looking for other opportunities. Overall, employers should be empathetic as they communicate with employees and stick to the facts about safety in the workplace. Clear, concise and consistent communication can be critical to organizations

educating and engaging with employees. Strong and authentic communication can help employees feel heard and supported if they feel uncomfortable in the workplace.

### *Employee Referral Program*

Employees can be some of the best brand ambassadors, and they are likely connected to other strong workers. Many organizations have turned to referrals to offset the recruiting challenges posed by the pandemic. That trend will likely continue or increase as companies use such programs to their full potential.

People often run in like-minded circles. As such, employees on board with a vaccine mandate in the workplace may have other top talents in their networks who feel the same way. So, as it pertains to the vaccine mandate, an employee referral program or a revamped program with additional incentives could help an organization attract new talent while supporting current, strong employees.

### *Internal Talent*

The pandemic has made upskilling an important talent strategy to retain employees. If they haven't already, employers could focus on upskilling and retraining employees. Not only can this address skill gaps, but it will support employees' career growth. Upskilling demonstrates that employers care about workers' careers and futures. It can be critical to retaining employees on board with workplace vaccine mandates while also offering an attractive perk to employees who may be on the fence about going to a didn't company without a mandate. Employees who receive training and development opportunities are typically happier in their roles and believe in the company. Upskilling is a way to support employees in their career development while also creating new business opportunities.

### *Safety Communication*

Keep in mind that the pandemic has propelled safety to the forefront of current and future talent concerns. While an organization may be going above and beyond to ensure the safety of employees, these efforts must also be highlighted in employer branding by prioritizing safety in employment- and nonemployment-related materials. Safety-related

expectations must also be included in job descriptions and postings.

Employers can start planning now to update job descriptions and company information that highlight or include COVID-19 safety and vaccine information. The overall goal of workplace preventive measures and vaccine mandates is to provide employees with a safe, healthy environment amid the pandemic. Safety continues to be a key driver of employment decisions, so employers can attract and retain more employees by transparently sharing applicable measures and policies in place. Now more than ever, employees are looking for a workplace where they feel safe.

## Summary

Whether directly impacted by the vaccine mandate or not, employers of all sizes need to make a concerted effort to attract and retain more employees as vaccination workplace policies are about to change for some. Remember that a small percentage of employers will be impacted, but they employ a majority of workers.

The first step is understanding where employees stand so organizations know how to approach the topic and craft strategies that will best resonate with their workforce. It'll come down to listening to and supporting employees and offering attractive workplace benefits to bring in skilled employees and keep more employees on board.

As employers await more guidance from OSHA, now is an excellent time to understand not only how vaccine mandates could impact their talent strategy today and beyond but also how to take preventive measures to address employees' concerns and questions. Contact Hausmann Group today for more employee attraction and retention resources.