

# Employee Well-being Insights

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## Employer Overview of the COVID-19 Vaccines

The COVID-19 pandemic has been wreaking havoc in the UK for over a year at this point. Now, vaccines are finally here. There is a lot of information on the internet regarding the vaccines, some of which is misleading. It's important for employers to learn the facts about the COVID-19 vaccines so they can better protect their employees and customers.

This article provides an overview of the COVID-19 vaccines and answers some common questions relevant to employers. Information comes primarily from the National Health Service (NHS) and may be updated over time.

### Are There Multiple Vaccines?

There are three vaccines that have been given emergency use authorisation by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) at the time of this writing: the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, the Moderna vaccine and the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine. The vaccines differ in some ways (namely, how they must be shipped and stored), but they are fundamentally the same.

### Are the Vaccines Worth Getting?

The vaccines have gone through rigorous vetting procedures and clinical trials, attesting to their safety and effectiveness. The vaccines protect not only the individual, but also anyone they might come into contact with. This can dramatically help curb the spread of COVID-19.

### Are There Side Effects?

Like most other vaccines, these may come with mild side effects, including:

- A sore arm near where the jab was administered
- Fatigue
- Aches
- Headache
- Feelings of sickness

Employees experiencing these or other symptoms for more than three days should contact their GP.

### How Will They Be Administered?

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and Moderna vaccines must be administered in two doses—one initial jab and another three to four weeks later. The Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine also consists of two doses with the second coming between four and 12 weeks after the first. Getting both jabs will provide the most protection, though a single dose should still offer some protective benefits, according to experts.

### Who Should Receive the Vaccines?

Individuals aged 16 and up can receive a vaccine (depending on which one). However, there are some caveats to this, particularly if the individual has certain health conditions. While experts are encouraging as many people as possible to get vaccinated, anyone considering getting the vaccines should first consult their GP.



## Who Should Not Receive the Vaccines?

There has yet to be a vaccine produced for children under the age of 16, although one is expected eventually. Beyond young children, other people who should not receive the vaccines include:

- Anyone with severe allergies to any ingredients contained within the vaccines
- Anyone who experienced an allergic reaction—severe or not—after receiving their first dose of the vaccines
- Anyone with underlying medical conditions that may not respond well to the vaccines

Employees should talk to their GP to learn whether the vaccines are safe for them to receive.

## Do Employees Need the Vaccines if They Recovered From COVID-19 Already?

If someone previously contracted and recovered from COVID-19, they should still receive the vaccines if they can, according to the NHS.

## When Will the Vaccines Be Available?

The vaccines are currently available only to select individuals who are at high risk of contracting COVID-19. This list includes people aged 50 and over, people at high risk from COVID-19, people with other conditions that put them at risk, carers, people who live and work in care homes, and frontline health and social workers. Ultimately, as more doses are produced and distributed, it will be up to the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation to decide the order in which people can receive the vaccines.

Individuals should monitor the news to learn more about when and how the vaccines may be made available to them.

## Can the Vaccines Be Mandatory for Employees?

Organisations have a duty to enact reasonable policies and rules that will keep their workforce safe. To that end, it is justifiable for employers to request that all employees get the vaccine. But, while employers can ask workers to do so, it may be difficult to enforce a policy if an employee declines.

Employers should be cautious about any disciplinary actions related to a refusal to get the vaccine. Requiring employees to receive the vaccine—and punishing those who do not—could result in an organisation facing legal

action. It is possible that this type of requirement could result in a violation of UK discrimination laws, such as the Equality Act 2010. In addition, employers should be aware that employees may have legitimate medical reasons for not being able to get the vaccine.

## Can COVID-19 Precautions End if All Employees Are Vaccinated?

The vaccines are only one of several tools in the arsenal used to fight COVID-19. So even after receiving both doses of the vaccines, other workplace safeguards should remain in effect, including:

- Washing hands frequently
- Wearing masks
- Social distancing
- Self-quarantining if sick

There is still much unknown about the vaccines. Maintaining these precautions will help ensure a higher level of safety for employees, their families and the community at large.

Visit the [NHS website](#) for more answers to COVID-19-related questions. Contact us today for additional workplace guidance on this and other topics relevant to your organisation.