

Hello. It looks like you're using an ad blocker that may prevent our website from working properly. To receive the best experience possible, please make sure any blockers are switched off and refresh the page.

If you have any questions or need help you can email us

mandate for employees to get vaccinated to simply encouraging or incentivizing it. While there are benefits to a firm supporting the vaccination, there are also risks ...

Mar. 03, 2021



As the pandemic stretches past the one-year mark, CPA firms are in uncharted employee wellness territory – from having to navigate decisions about the COVID-19 vaccine to finding ways to support employee mental wellness. And as firm leaders look to create new guidelines and policies, understanding the latest developments and potential risks will be important to protecting employees and the firm itself.

Planning Your Vaccine Approach

CPA firms can handle the COVID-19 vaccine in a few different ways – from issuing a

Hello. It looks like you're using an ad blocker that may prevent our website from working properly. To receive the best experience possible, please make sure any blockers are switched off and refresh the page.

If you have any questions or need help you can email us

that an employee may not want to comply. For example, if an employee refuses to be vaccinated due to a medical disability or holds religious beliefs against immunization, firm leaders should remain neutral and consider accommodating the request.

Refrain from asking the employee the specific reasons behind their decision unless absolutely necessary, as it sets the stage for a potentially stressful and difficult to manage situation. According to Dr. Neal Mills, Chief Medical Officer for Aon, if an employee insists on noncompliance based upon legitimate medical or religious reasons, consider reasonable alternatives like permanent work from home implementation to avoid the potential risk of a discrimination lawsuit against the firm.

Additionally, an employee may refuse vaccination due to the fear of a potential allergic reaction post-vaccination. Although it is extremely rare – with only 11 in 1 million experiencing significant side effects – J.D. Piro, Senior Vice President and Head of Aon's Health Law Group, says it is still something to take into consideration when exploring a vaccine mandate. And Carol Ungaretti, managing consultant of U.S. Casualty Claims at Aon, says that if an employee received and reacted poorly to a mandated vaccine, that injury can be deemed compensable and payable under most workers' compensation statutes.

As an alternative to a mandate, providing incentives that encourage vaccination can be an idea that employers and employees can both get behind. In general, this model tends to be beneficial to all parties and can help soften the blow of some of the potential risks. However, one potential issue for such a model is a low adoption rate. For example, the Los Angeles County Fire Department recently implemented a \$1,000 incentive to encourage all of its firefighters to get vaccinated. Despite the bonus, less than half of the department's firefighters opted in. The low acceptance rate was

attributed to a lack of information about the vaccine as well as general skepticism

Hello. It looks like you're using an ad blocker that may prevent our website from working properly. To receive the best experience possible, please make sure any blockers are switched off and refresh the page.

If you have any questions or need help you can email us

vaccination but also promotes the importance of coming together to stop the spread of the virus. As Andy Slavitt, White House Senior Advisor for COVID 19 Response, said during a recent Aon webinar, “this is an orchestra and we all have to play our part.”

- To mitigate your risks, Dr. Mills also recommends creating a strong, proactive communication strategy. Make sure your employees truly understand the effects of COVID-19 as well as the science behind the benefits of the vaccine, tapping into reputable sources like the CDC. Quite simply, the more employees understand about both the virus and vaccine, the more likely they are to consider getting vaccinated.
- Finally, firms should consider ways to help their employees who want to get the vaccine. Make it easy for them to get to their appointment – whether that's by providing an extra day off or offering schedule flexibility.

Supporting Mental Wellness

Another important issue impacting CPA firms is managing employee mental stress. According to an NHIS and US Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, the average share of adults reporting symptoms of anxiety or depression disorder in January of 2019 was at a low of 11%. In 2021, that number skyrocketed to 41%.

During the pandemic, the importance of mental wellness became very apparent. And as a result, employers have started to support mental wellness much in the way they've traditionally supported physical wellness – offering programs, benefits and services to help their employees be proactive in managing their mental health and navigate through tough times.

Beyond formal programs, there are also little steps firms can take to support their employees' mental wellness that can make a big impact:

- Encourage them to stay informed. Knowledge is power – it can help you make

Hello. It looks like you're using an ad blocker that may prevent our website from working properly. To receive the best experience possible, please make sure any blockers are switched off and refresh the page.

If you have any questions or need help you can email us

the issues that may just be causing up. Asking a question before it's asked can reduce anxiety, build trust, create a sense of togetherness and eliminate barriers to focusing on the task at hand.

- Remind employees to take a break. Just because you can sit in your home office all day and work for 12 hours straight doesn't mean you should. And just because you can take a call at 7 in the morning or 7 at night doesn't mean you should do that either. Yet, because the lines between work and personal life have become so blurred, many employees are doing these very things. Firm leaders need to remind them to take a break, engage in a hobby, and regroup. Stepping away, even for a short period of time, can have significant mental wellness benefits.

Navigating the COVID-19 landscape is difficult requiring much consideration as well as trial and error in order to reach the finish line. It is vital to understand the potential risks that lie ahead and create solutions to combat them in the most effective way possible to support your firm and your employees as we move toward recovery.

This information is provided for general informational purposes only and is not intended to provide individualized guidance or advice. You should discuss your individual circumstances thoroughly with your professional advisors before taking any action.

Accounting • Benefits • Firm Management • Staffing

Hello. It looks like you're using an ad blocker that may prevent our website from working properly. To receive the best experience possible, please make sure any blockers are switched off and refresh the page.

If you have any questions or need help you can email us