



Insights

Developing a COVID-19 vaccine strategy for the workplace: A conversation with **Papatya Tankut**, vice president, Human Resources - Retail, CVS Health®

The rollout of COVID-19 vaccines ushers in a new phase of the pandemic — and raises new questions for employers. Though the vaccine is generally seen as key to business continuity, there's less consensus around what constitutes an effective coronavirus vaccine strategy. Should the vaccine be required? And what should employers do about workers who are hesitant or refuse to get vaccinated?

To learn how CVS Health is approaching its vaccine strategy for its employees, we sat down with Papatya Tankut. Here, she explains how the company is encouraging employees to get vaccinated, the importance of communicating the right information to the right colleagues, and the guiding principle driving the overall strategy.



Insights with Papatya Tankut



Check out our interview with the CVS Health® vice president of Human Resources on the company's COVID-19 vaccine strategy.



Can you describe the makeup of the CVS Health workforce?

CVS Health has approximately 300,000 employees across the country. This includes staff across our family of companies, including Aetna®, CVS Caremark®, CVS Pharmacy® and Omnicare®. We have employees in retail locations and corporate and field offices, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, health care practitioners, and distribution center and mail order employees.

What is the CVS Health strategy as it begins to vaccinate employees?

Our guiding principle is to make the process of getting vaccinated as simple and efficient as we can for our employees and provide them with as much education and awareness as possible.

“ We stand ready to play a big role in hopefully helping to end this pandemic. ”

To the degree that we can, we have identified which colleagues align to each of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's defined vaccination phase. We have many who are eligible for early phases of the vaccine because of their jobs as health care professionals or essential workers. As information becomes available about state- or county-run clinics, we are passing it along to eligible colleagues. For example, if New York is offering free statewide clinics for health care professionals, we'll share the website with employees in that state, encourage them to check their eligibility, and make an appointment. Colleagues can also visit their state or county Department of Health website or contact their primary care physician, who will also be working with the state on behalf of their patients to determine how vaccines are distributed.

Because we are a leading health services company, we are also working with some states on a short-term model to directly vaccinate our own eligible colleagues. And once the general population is eligible, we will play a broader role, not just in vaccinating our own colleagues but millions of people across the country. We stand ready to play a big role in hopefully helping to end this pandemic.



Does CVS Health® plan to mandate the vaccine?

We're not mandating vaccination for any category or group of our employees. However, we strongly encourage it from a public health standpoint. We know that it's one of the best ways to protect yourself and your loved ones from COVID-19. And we're reinforcing that message by sharing the information our colleagues need to schedule a vaccination. Our chief medical officers have been vocal in this space, communicating to the enterprise via email and video messages to help educate our colleagues about the vaccine and encourage them to get vaccinated.

We continue to look at all aspects of how we can best help our colleagues stay safe and care for themselves. We continue to reinforce basic public health measures such as wearing face coverings and washing hands. And we're making sure that our colleagues know where to turn for help with their mental and emotional health.

How are you thinking about the dynamics of employees who decide not to vaccinate?

Our goal as a health care company is to continue to communicate to our colleagues the benefits of being vaccinated and why a COVID-19 vaccine is important from a public health standpoint. We recognize there may be some level of hesitancy for a variety of reasons, probably similar to what we're seeing across the national footprint. We also know there may be some individuals who are more likely to want to get vaccinated.

I think it comes down to ongoing education, to providing the facts about what the vaccine is, what it does, what steps it's gone through to get approved, how it can help you, and how it can help the other people around you. The information out there can be complex and overwhelming, so I look to our chief medical officers and medical personnel to help shepherd that message across the organization. I'm proud of the internal messages Troy Brennan, MD, chief medical officer, CVS Health, and his team share with colleagues. I think they are a primary voice that many of us look to as being credible in the medical field. Continuing to share information about the importance and safety of the vaccine is part of our strategy.

“ Our goal as a health care company is to continue to communicate to our colleagues the benefits of being vaccinated. ”



What are your biggest concerns about rolling out the vaccine among employees?

Because the rollout is state- and even county-driven in select areas, it's running at different paces in different locations. When you have a workforce as large as ours, you want to be able to communicate in real time the information that's available so people can react to it. So that can be challenging in a very large organization such as ours.

As I've mentioned earlier, communication to our colleagues is key. We are continuously working on communicating information about vaccine access and availability to our colleagues, including those on the front lines, using distribution channels and vehicles that will reach them in a timely and effective manner.



Do you have any advice for other employers as they develop their vaccine strategy?

I think communication, education and awareness are key — no matter what your strategy is. Whether or not you mandate the vaccination, you have to think about how you will communicate that decision to your employees. I would fall back on providing as much clear, simple, and direct communication as you can during this time. Keep in mind that there's an overwhelming amount of information out there. How do you filter out the facts to allow colleagues to make the right decisions for themselves? And how do you provide them with the venues that make it easy for them get that vaccination?

“ Communication, education and awareness are the key — no matter what your strategy is. ”



For additional COVID-19-related resources, please visit [Aetna.com/employers-organizations](https://www.aetna.com/employers-organizations), or contact your account representative.