HEALTH ACTION ALLIANCE

BOOST UP FOR WINTER

An employer toolkit to boost your company's health into 2023

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INTRODUCTION

It's been several months since the new COVID-19 boosters became available and recommended for all adults — offering the best available protection against the Omicron variant — fewer than one in six U.S. adults have gotten one.

Looked at one way, this reflects the progress we've collectively made against the pandemic: thanks to life-saving vaccines, many people no longer fear the worst. But for employers, the slow uptake of the new boosters is also a missed opportunity to bolster the health of your people and your business heading into the peak season for respiratory illness (and health-related absences), even as Omicron and its newest subvariants continue to circulate and threaten to prolong the pandemic.

As a country, we can do better. **Employers, as a highly trusted source of health information, are in a position to make a difference.**

Companies can influence booster uptake through employee communication, incentives and providing access to booster shots, whether on-site at your workplace or through policies like paid time off for vaccination.

This toolkit is designed as a plug-and-play campaign to increase booster rates among your workforce. Inside you'll find:

- **The Business Case for Action**
- **Communication Tips & Key Messages**
- **Answers to Common Questions**
- **Booster Checklist for Employers**
- **Sample Email to Employees**
- **Sample Social Media Copy & Graphics**
- **Additional Resources**

HEALTH ACTION ALLIANCE

The Health Action Alliance is a unique collaboration between leading business, communications and public health organizations to help employers navigate evolving health challenges, improve the health of workers and engage with public health partners to build stronger, healthier communities. Learn more at healthaction.org.

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TOOLKIT SPONSORSHIP

Financial support for the development of this resource was provided by Pfizer. The Health Action Alliance is solely responsible for the content of this toolkit and maintains full editorial control of its resources.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR ACTION

- **The updated boosters cut a person's risk of COVID-19 illness by roughly half.** New data from November 2022 show that the updated boosters reduce the risk of getting COVID by 43%-56% compared to people who are 8 months or more from their last shot. A 50% risk reduction at no cost is an easy win for your company's health.

- **You need your people to be healthy.** Hitting 4th quarter goals and starting 2023 strong ahead of a possible economic downturn is hard to do if you're constrained by higher-than-normal absenteeism. Yet 1 in 3 large employers (500+ employees) said in a recent Mercer survey that COVID-related absences remain an issue for their organization.
    - On top of that, COVID-19 has spread the last two winters (including the devastating Omicron surge last winter).
    - And we're in the midst of a severe flu season that has already seen an all-time high in work absences because of childcare problems.

- **Play the "long" game.** There's no surer way to avoid long COVID than not getting infected (or reinfected) with COVID-19. Long COVID is an area of growing concern. As a result of long COVID, 26% of employers in Mercer's survey said short-term disability leaves increased this year compared to last year.

Increasing uptake of the new booster is the most effective way to maximize protection from COVID-19 and limit its impact on your organization.



COMMUNICATION TIPS & KEY MESSAGES

Uptake of the new boosters has been slow, but that doesn't mean people have rejected them — many just haven't heard about them.

- Recent polling from the Kaiser Family Foundation shows that half of U.S. adults (51%) have heard "little" or "nothing at all" about the updated boosters.

- There is a link between hearing about the booster and getting it: across age groups, hearing "some" or "a lot" about the new boosters corresponds to higher rates of uptake or plans to get the new booster as soon as possible.

Over half of Americans still intend to get the new booster, according to a December 2022 survey from Morning Consult. Based on the reasons people gave for not getting boosted yet, the main points employers need to communicate are:

» **A compelling reason to get boosted.**
» **The new booster works.**
» **The new booster is safe.**
» **COVID-19 is still a threat.**

TIPS FOR COMPANY COMMUNICATIONS:

- **Use all the channels at your disposal** to reach employees with essential information about the new boosters, their effectiveness and their safety. In addition to the sample email and social media copy in this toolkit, the key messages below can be integrated into HR bulletins, digital displays and team meetings.

- **Make it personal.** Your company leaders are trusted messengers on health topics, so encourage them to share their stories about why they got their booster shots. This may include an emotional appeal ("I want to know I can enjoy a healthy holiday with my family") or a mention of how easy it was ("I made an appointment at my neighborhood pharmacy, and got in and out within minutes.").

- **Share employees' stories, too.** Invite employees from underrepresented groups who have received the booster to share their experiences. Reassuring stories from peers are nearly as important as getting the facts.



KEY MESSAGES:

- Vaccinations work best when we keep them up to date.
- Boosters show that medical experts are continuing to find ways to prolong protection through vaccines.
- The updated COVID-19 booster shot is specially designed to protect against recent Omicron subvariants. It restores the protection of vaccines, even against mild cases, that wanes over time. It is our best protection against COVID-19. That's why the updated booster is recommended by the CDC for all adults and children ages 5 and older.
- Now is the time to get the updated booster. If you are vaccinated, but haven't already received the updated booster, you are eligible today. Not sure if you received the new booster? If you received your last booster shot before August 31st, 2022, you are eligible for the updated booster.
- The updated booster works. It has been proven to reduce your risk of getting COVID by about 50% compared to people who've gone 8 months or more without getting boosted.
- The updated booster is safe. The process for creating it was similar to the one medical experts use each year to update the flu vaccine. Over 37 million people in the U.S. have now received the updated booster shot.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) monitor vaccines for safety. It has found that side effects from the updated boosters are consistent with those from the original booster, and are less common and less serious than health impacts associated with COVID-19 illness.







ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS

These questions and answers are designed to be distributed directly to employees or to equip managers and other leaders for conversations about the updated boosters.

Why do we need a new booster?

The updated COVID-19 booster shot is specially designed to protect against recent Omicron subvariants. It restores the protection of vaccines, even against mild cases, that wanes over time. It is our best protection against COVID-19.

Does the new booster work?

New data from November 2022 shows that the updated booster cuts your risk of getting COVID by about 50% compared to people who are 8 months or more from their last shot.

Who can get the new booster?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now recommends that all adults and children ages 5 and over receive the updated COVID-19 booster shot.

If you are unvaccinated, the CDC recommends that you get your primary series (the initial two doses of either the Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, or Novavax vaccines, or one dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine), and then wait at least two months to get the updated booster dose.

When should you get the new booster?

Now is the time to get the updated booster. If you are vaccinated, but haven't already received the updated booster, you are eligible today.

Not sure if you received the new booster? If you received your last booster shot before August 31st, 2022, you are eligible for the updated booster.

If you did not receive one of the original booster shots, the new one can — and should — be your first.

What if I recently had COVID-19?

People who have recently been infected with COVID-19 may wait 3 months from the time they were infected before getting a vaccine (if they are unvaccinated) or a booster.

ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS (CONT.)

Where can I get the new booster?

COVID-19 boosters are easy to access and widely available across the country, including at thousands of retail pharmacy locations. Use Vaccines.gov to find local booster distribution sites and to schedule appointments.

Is the new booster safe?

The process for creating the updated COVID-19 booster was similar to the one medical experts use each year to update the flu vaccine. Over 37 million people in the U.S. have now received the updated booster shot.

The CDC monitors vaccines for safety. It has found that side effects from the updated boosters are consistent with those from the original booster, and are less common and less serious than health impacts associated with COVID-19 illness.

Can I mix and match COVID-19 vaccines and boosters?

There are two versions of the new booster available: one from Pfizer-BioNTech, and one from Moderna. You can get either the Pfizer or Moderna updated booster, regardless of the brand of your primary series or previous booster dose.

If we need an updated booster dose, does that mean vaccines aren't working?

Booster doses are common for many vaccines. Over time, booster doses may be updated to provide optimal protection against new variants of the virus. The medical experts who developed the COVID-19 vaccines continue to watch for waning immunity, how well the vaccines protect against new mutations of the virus and how data differ across age groups and risk factors.

How much does it cost to get a booster?

COVID-19 vaccines, including the updated booster shots, are completely free for every person living in the U.S., even if you do not have insurance.

If I get my booster, how quickly will it take effect?

It takes two weeks for the booster to be fully effective, but you will get some protection from it even sooner — so don't wait.

This resource was adapted in part from Answers to Tough Questions about Public Health published by our partners at the Public Health Communications Collaborative.

BOOSTER CHECKLIST FOR EMPLOYERS ☑

Here are six steps every employer should consider to accelerate uptake of the new COVID-19 boosters:

☐ Share booster facts

Share facts about the safety and efficacy of the new boosters. Use the Communications Tips & Key Messages as well as the Answers to Common Questions within this toolkit.

☐ Help employees find boosters

Encourage employees to use Vaccines.gov to find local booster distribution sites and to schedule appointments. Many of the major retail pharmacy chains, including Walgreens and CVS, also offer online appointment scheduling for boosters.

☐ Partner with your public health dept.

Reach out to your local public health department to learn more about hosting a booster clinic at your worksite. This makes it easiest for your employees and their families to access the new COVID-19 boosters.

☐ Provide PTO

Provide paid time off for employees to get their boosters and recover from possible side effects. A best practice is offering paid time off to working parents to take their eligible children for booster appointments, too.

☐ Engage ERGs

Engage your employee resource groups (ERGs) to share the latest information about boosters, answer their questions and address any unique access challenges their members may face.

☐ Consider incentives

Consider offering incentives to individuals or teams to get boosted. Your goal is to drive quick action to limit illnesses this winter, when health-related absenteeism typically hits its peak. Consider providing prizes, rewards or modest financial incentives (i.e., gift cards, coupons, etc.) to employees who get boosted or teams that show the most growth in rates of booster uptake.

SAMPLE EMAIL TO EMPLOYEES

To: All Employees
From: CEO's Office
Date: Today, 2:00pm ET
Subject: Boost Up for Winter

Dear Colleague,

I hope you're able to enjoy time off with your family and friends this holiday season. Whether you seek excitement or peace and quiet, new adventures or old traditions, it's great to recharge and reconnect with the people you love.

We all remember the 2020 holiday season when COVID-19 denied most of us that opportunity. And we remember the joy of reuniting in 2021 after most of us had received the life-saving protection of the COVID-19 vaccines.

This year, to make sure we can again enjoy a healthy holiday with our loved ones, there is something easy we can all do — get the new booster shot to restore our protection against COVID-19.

These boosters were specially formulated for the Omicron variants that caused a major spike in cases last winter, and which continue to cause illness and death. The new boosters are safe and they're effective — they cut your risk of getting COVID-19 by about half compared to going eight or more months without a booster. Vaccines work best when we keep them up to date. So, if you haven't had a booster shot since August 31st, then you haven't had the new booster, and I encourage you to get it right away.

To make it easier for you, ***[Company name]*** will ***[Insert your company's plans here, e.g. provide (paid) time off to get the booster, host an on-site clinic, offer individual/team incentives, etc.]***.

I got the new booster at my neighborhood pharmacy. It was a simple, fast experience that made me feel safe knowing COVID-19 will not get in my way of spending time with my extended family over the holidays. I also know that boosters are my best shot for staying healthy this winter.

That's what I want for you, too.

Thank you for all that you do — for ***[Company name]***, your well-being and the well-being of the rest of our team.

Sincerely,

[Name of CEO or trusted leader]

SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA COPY

37 million Americans have gotten their updated booster against COVID-19. Have you? Make your appointment today. Visit Vaccines.gov to find out where the new booster is available near you.

Stay healthy this holiday season. Update your immunity from COVID-19 with the updated booster shot. Visit vaccines.gov to find out where the new booster is available near you.

The new boosters against COVID-19 are safe and effective. Making an appointment to get yours is easy. Visit vaccines.gov to find out where the new booster is available near you.

Don't let COVID-19 stand in the way of a healthy holiday with the people you love. Get the updated booster to reduce your risk of infection. It's fast, easy and free. Visit vaccines.gov to find out where the new booster is available near you.

Updated boosters are our best shot at avoiding another winter surge of COVID-19. If you haven't already gotten your updated booster, you're eligible for it today. Get the peace of mind from the best protection available. Visit vaccines.gov to find out where the new booster is available near you.

COVID is still frightful, but new boosters make winter delightful. Visit vaccines.gov to find out where the new booster is available near you.

SOCIAL MEDIA GRAPHICS

Here are a sample of social media graphics that we have developed for your company to share. To download these graphics and more, please click here.











ADDITIONAL BOOSTER RESOURCES

HEALTH ACTION ALLIANCE'S TOP COVID-19 RESOURCES:

- Quick Start Guide: Strengthening Workplace Vaccination & Safety
- COVID-19 Endemic Readiness Tool for Employers
- Communications Guidance for Employers
- Conversation Guide for Managers
- Small Business Checklist

BOOSTER RESOURCES FROM PUBLIC HEALTH PARTNERS:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
- Public Health Communications Collaborative
- Vaccines.gov

SPONSORED LINKS FROM PFIZER

- COVID-19 Vaccination Brief for Employers
- Updated COVID-19 Booster One-Pager
- COVID-19 Insights for Employers
- COVID-19 Treatment Pamphlet

DISCLAIMER: Public health guidance on COVID-19 is evolving. Health Action Alliance is committed to regularly updating our materials once we've engaged public health, business and communications experts about the implications of new guidance from the public health community and effective business strategies that align with public health goals.

This toolkit is not intended to be, and should not be construed as, legal, business, medical, scientific or any other advice for any particular situation. The content included herein is provided for informational purposes only and may not reflect the most current developments as the subject matter is extremely fluid.

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