



## COVID-19 VACCINATIONS – MANAGING DISRUPTIONS FROM EMPLOYEE SIDE EFFECTS

Now that Massachusetts' COVID-19 vaccination rollout has entered Phase 3, and with vaccination of the general public anticipated to begin in April, employers should consider how widespread availability of the vaccine will affect their workforce. Because vaccine side effects could temporarily impact worker availability, employers should plan ahead to limit or avoid worker shortages and respond appropriately to employees' side effects.

### CDC Guidance on Vaccine Side Effects

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (the "CDC"), COVID-19 vaccine trials indicate that most side effects from the vaccine are mild. Side effects generally occur on the day of vaccination and the following two days, with most occurring the day after vaccination. Side effects resolve within one to two days. Data also shows that side effects tend to be more frequent and severe following the second dose of the vaccine.

The CDC currently expects that most employees who experience symptoms following vaccination will not need to miss work. However, some vaccinated employees may miss work if they experience certain side effects, including fever. Employers can manage the impact of vaccine side effects on their business through appropriate scheduling and by establishing a policy for responding to the side effects for which the CDC has advised employees to remain at home.

### Avoid Worker Shortages Through Scheduling

To reduce the risk of overlapping employee absences due to side effects, an employer might consider staggering the schedules of employees who receive vaccinations. Employers might also consider encouraging employees to schedule vaccinations on or prior to their days off to minimize the overlap between any recovery period and the workweek.

If an employer offers vaccination at the workplace, it might consider staggering employee vaccination schedules to avoid worker shortages due to vaccine side effects. However, such employers should balance the benefits of staggering vaccinations against any costs, such as delays in reaching full vaccination of an employer's staff.

### Advanced Planning Is Particularly Important for the Second Dose

Staggering employee schedules may be more important for the second vaccine dose, which according to the CDC, is more frequently associated with side effects. To avoid interruptions to business operations, employers might consider staggering the work schedules of key employees or employees in the same job category or who work in the same area when those employees receive the second dose of the vaccination.

### Responding to Employee Symptoms After Vaccination

The CDC has published suggested approaches to evaluating and managing post-vaccination symptoms, including fever. The CDC recommends that employees who experience a fever after vaccination should stay home from work pending further evaluation, including consideration for COVID-19 testing. The CDC also recommends encouraging employees to stay home and contact their doctor if redness or tenderness at the injection site increases after 24 hours, or if side effects do not subside after two or three days.

Employers will need to continue assessing a variety of safety issues and practical considerations brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and the related vaccination programs. The path an employer takes regarding mandating vaccinations should be carefully thought out in advance in order to prepare for the various business and legal issues that will arise in the coming months.

