



Forrester: Despite COVID-19 Vaccine Deployment Underway, Employers Must Exercise Caution As They Plan To Reopen Physical Offices

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Vaccine passports in the workplace raise new privacy, ethical, legal, and compliance challenges that will define pandemic management plans

CAMBRIDGE, Mass., March 18, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- As COVID-19 vaccine deployment and mass vaccination programs get underway, employers are at a new decision point: how to accelerate the "back to normal" without overstepping their bounds. According to [Forrester](#) (Nasdaq: FORR), 40% of European and 30% of US employees are ready to return to the office, requiring employers to prepare for an array of new privacy, ethical, legal, and compliance challenges as they plan to leverage vaccine and immunization passports to return employees to the workplace.

From doubts about vaccines' effectiveness to significant country-by-country variation in administration priorities, employers need to be cautious as they define their pandemic management plans. In its new report, "[The Opportunity, The Unknowns, And The Risks Of Vaccine Passports In The Workplace](#)," Forrester identifies several risks that employers must address if deploying vaccine passports — a digital document that provides evidence of an individual's immunization status — to inform their return-to-work strategies. Risk exposure includes sensitive data mishandling, discrimination, labor union mobilization, diminished cybersecurity, and negative impact on the customer experience.

The graphic showing all 15 risks is attached.

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Employers Must Assess And Mitigate 15 Risks Of Vaccine Management In The Workplace
The Opportunity, The Unknowns, And The Risks Of Vaccine Passports In The Workplace



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Key highlights from the reports include:

- **Vaccines are not a silver bullet.** Factors ranging from global vaccine strategies to early-stage understanding of the virus, its variants, and efficacy of the vaccine mean employers must plan to continue anywhere-work policies and hybrid experiences to balance convenience with well-being.
- **Avoid the privacy and ethical pitfalls of a "no job, no job" policy.** Forty percent of European and 30% of US employees are ready to return to the office, but asking employees to carry proof of inoculation with them to enter the workplace introduces privacy and ethics risks.
- **Follow principles of proportionality, fairness, and transparency.** Employers should collect only the minimum amount of data needed to trigger specific policies. They should encrypt medical data and enforce strict access, sharing, and deletion policies to ensure fairness and protection.

- **Employers must navigate compliance and legal risks.** In the US, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) agreed that employers can make the vaccine mandatory for employees, but several state legislatures have challenged the legality of such a requirement. In the EU and UK, each country has its own approach.
- **Be mindful of customer experience and perceptions.** Relaxing protocols for distancing, sanitization, and mask wearing in customer-facing interactions risks a negative impact on how customers perceive a brand and their willingness to do business with the organization.

"While COVID-19 is loosening its grip, it's not going away," said Enza Iannopolo, senior analyst at Forrester. "Vaccine passports don't offer the silver-bullet solution that many might hope for easing pandemic protocols and restrictions, and businesses should be planning for life with COVID in the medium to long term. Our overarching message to organizations everywhere is one of caution. With the right planning and consideration, the return to work will be smoother and more successful for all involved."

Related Resources:

- [Read the blog.](#)
- Additional research: "[Vaccines Will Not Accelerate Travel Unless There Is Order And Collaboration](#)" (client access required).
- [Read the latest insights and guidance](#) for leaders to address the business and employee experience implications of COVID-19.


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