

## Worker Health and Safety during COVID-19

Across the United States, the IRC provides community-based, linguistically- and culturally-responsive programs to 50,000 diverse, low-income individuals each year, including to those in refugee, immigrant, and migrant (RIM) communities. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic slowdown, more than 50 million Americans lost their jobs within a matter of weeks, with RIM communities being disproportionately impacted. Many RIM workers who were able to maintain their jobs continue to be employed in essential service and frontline positions, putting them at greater risk of being exposed to COVID-19. In addition to working in high-risk occupations, RIM communities have often been unable to access appropriate, in-language information on the vaccine and on workplace health and safety during the pandemic. The IRC has worked to assist RIM communities with overcoming these inequalities by providing culturally and linguistically accessible educational support to RIM workers both directly and through their employers.

This guidebook shares information the IRC has learned through experiences collaborating with employers and RIM workers to promote workplace health and safety throughout the pandemic. This includes the process for and best practices of engaging employers to support their RIM employees in a culturally and linguistically accessible fashion to promote workplace health and safety during COVID-19. Engagement with employers can include:

- **Hosting trainings on worker health and safety and workers' rights during COVID-19 for HR staff, supervisors, or employees themselves**
- **The provision of culturally and linguistically accessible materials and resources related to COVID-19 to employers**
- **Advocating for workplace health and safety considerations**

Workforce development professionals, community-based organizations (CBOs), RIM community advocates and others are encouraged to use the guidance in this guidebook to engage employers in support of COVID-19 health and safety measures and vaccine promotion.

Strategies discussed in this guidebook include **selecting appropriate employers to engage, determining their needs, and delivering trainings and materials that best support clients**. It also provides information on **creating accessible trainings and materials specifically for RIM communities**. Engaging with RIM workers through their employers provides the unique opportunity to both support the economic independence of RIM workers and strengthen

relationships with employers that can be leveraged over time to continue to advocate for new American workers.

## Employer Engagement Best Practices

When engaging employers to offer support with COVID-19 worker health and safety for workers from RIM communities, consider the following best practices and guiding principles:

- **ENGAGE EMPLOYERS WITH WHOM YOU HAVE EXISTING RELATIONSHIPS.**  
Start with employers with whom you already have strong trusted relationships because they are more likely to respond positively. Begin by asking them what their needs are in regards to worker health and safety and vaccine access during COVID-19. Inquire if they are having any difficulty meeting these needs with people who are not proficient in the English language or who are new to the United States.
- **GIVE THEM WHAT THEY WANT.**  
Respond by offering something they need and value. Depending on your resources you can:
  - **Connect them to existing multi-lingual materials that meet their needs.** In-language resources support worker comprehension and adoption of COVID-19 health and safety protocols and ensure a deeper understanding of information being shared. Work with the target employer to determine the primary language needs of their employees. Do the research for them and offer them a variety of formats including print and video options.
  - **Offer onsite, in-language trainings.** Onsite trainings with RIM employees are effective, impactful, and well-received by employers. Employers have a lot on their plates and are often appreciative of any effort to alleviate some of their burdens. Co-delivering trainings with an employer can be especially impactful and build trust with both the employer and RIM communities, as well as between the two. Additionally, when possible, participation in the training opportunities should be incentivized by catering the event or providing an alternative benefit to the employee.
  - **Help adapt trainings and materials to meet their needs.** If there are no existing materials that meet their need, offer to help co-create, adapt or translate materials so that they can be contextualized to meet the employer needs. Creating tailored documentation for employers builds their confidence in you and allows their RIM workers to obtain necessary information for their health and safety. Resources should be determined according to the employer and



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RIM worker needs and could include tools such as a COVID-19 common phrase sheet in English and the language of the RIM workers, in-language flyers on what to do if you think you have COVID-19, and localized information on vaccine opportunities.

- **EMPOWER THE EMPLOYER.**

Help employers understand the influence they hold with their workers and the critical role they play in teaching employees new to the United States about the rights they have, both federal and workplace-specific. This includes encouraging their human resources and supervisory personnel to join in this effort. Help equip and encourage employers to:

- **Educate employees about their rights.** Understanding impacts to pay and safety, including sick pay, leave time, vaccine leave, unemployment benefits, and the right to no retaliation is of central importance workers. These are also key to preventing the spread of COVID-19.
- **Communicate effectively with employees who are new to the U.S. or who may not be proficient in English.** Communicating effectively goes beyond simple translation. Teach employers techniques for ensuring that their employees understand accurate COVID-19 information. This could include repeating information often and utilizing images, picture and even video along with the translated documents to ensure messaging is also accessible to individuals with varying literacy levels.
- **Be a resource for accurate COVID-19 information.** There is significant myths, misinformation and disinformation in every community related to COVID-19, and in particular to COVID-19 vaccines. Countering these is critical to helping contain the spread of the virus and to return to some level of normalcy. At the same time, employers may be hesitant about playing the role of “experts” or appearing to “push” employees to get the vaccine. Remind employers that they can position themselves as helpful conduits of accurate information from trusted sources by pointing employees to information that is in their language.

- **POSITION YOURSELF AND OTHER CBOs AS LONG-TERM PARTNERS.**

IRC and other CBOs want to ensure that new Americans have employment, are safe in their workplace, and understand their rights. This is most effectively accomplished through partnerships with employers who are also aligned with these goals.

- **Remind employers you are here to help** with resources, training, and problem-solving.



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- **Help connect employers with other CBOs.** When the relationship can be mutually supportive to goals, help facilitate relationships between employers and other CBOs, especially those that are ethnic-community based organizations or mutual aid societies. Provide your employers with websites, flyers, and lists of local CBOs and activities so they are aware of the landscape of support available.

## Engaging RIM Communities

Although the most important action for employers to engage their RIM employees is to provide culturally and linguistically accessible support, consider the following additional best practices for creating impactful engagements with RIM worker communities:

- **There is no one-size-fits-all answer to engaging employers and providing pandemic support to RIM populations.** Every engagement requires tailoring to the unique needs of an employer and their employees and, often times, the local context of the particular city and state they reside in.
- **Center training information on following company safety protocols.** Human resource staff need to be able to provide clear explanations of their policies and be willing to listen to and address client worries. Key topics to focus on include:
  - The employer's COVID-19 safety and quarantine protocols and any cultural practices that may affect employee compliance with them
  - Sick leave policies, including how to accommodate time off for vaccine reception
  - Culturally-sensitive COVID-19 information, like risks and mitigation practices, to keep clients up to date on the pandemic

Interpretation and translation should be offered to employees in communicating these policies to RIM workers.

- **Highlight information on the company's and state's rules on sick pay and unemployment insurance** and how a worker might access those benefits should they be impacted by COVID-19. Workers impacted by COVID-19 in frontline and essential service roles are often not in a financial position to take time off of work or may worry about losing their jobs. RIM employees most often ask questions about who is going to pay them and how they are going to support their families should they be affected by the pandemic. Employers should be willing to assist their workers with utilizing the COVID-19 benefits provided by the employer and discuss how utilizing state and federal benefits affects their employment. Interpretation and translation should be offered to employees in communicating these policies to RIM workers.



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- **RIM-serving CBOs can provide support in communication between employers and employees.** Employers should be encouraged to leverage local community-based organizations (CBOs) to educate and empower them when it comes to their interactions with their RIM employees. They can, for example, depend on CBOs to provide understanding on possible barriers or considerations with regards to RIM worker adoption of workplace health and safety practices. Beyond the benefit of CBOs comprehension of cultural stigma around COVID-19, RIM communities typically have an established trust with local CBOs and may be more willing to listen.
- **Share information with RIM communities through a trusted source.** Often the most trusted messenger of information is from a member of the community. Information shared through community leaders is more accepted and adopted than information given by employers or government officials, or anyone outside of that particular community. Particularly with topics of personal health and safety, finding someone from within a particular community to disseminate information will be most impactful.

## Engaging Employers on Vaccine Promotion

Employers play an important role in their employees' access to vaccines. Outlined below are "Do's" and "Don'ts" guidance for employers to consider when engaging with their employees on vaccine access and promotion.

- **Do**
  - Repeat facts about the vaccine to increase familiarity with accurate information. [Review the Vaccine Misinformation Management Guide](#) for additional resource.
  - Provide flyers, fact sheets, or other documentation in language; if possible, add pictures and positive imaging.
  - Talk about how getting vaccinated will protect individuals, their families, and communities.
  - Discuss the risks involved with getting the vaccine and explain the potential side effects. [This resource](#) provides guidance on talking about the vaccine with clients.
  - Recognize that having questions about something new, such as the vaccine, is normal and that the most important thing is to provide trusted and accurate information.
  - Be open and prepared to answer common questions about the vaccine. Refer to [NRC-RIM guidance on vaccine education](#).



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- Share your experience with getting the vaccine (if you have received it) and find someone from the RIM community to share their experience.
- Share videos from people talking about the vaccine in their own language. A number of in-language videos on the vaccine from trusted faith and community leaders can be found [here](#) and [here](#).
- Work with CBOs (e.g., mosques, resettlement agencies, etc.) to disseminate information or host vaccination events.
- Expect and prepare for sick day requests during the first few days after vaccination.
- Understand that information gathering and decision making may take time, so be prepared to have multiple engagements to share vaccine information.
- **Do not**
  - Coerce, threaten, or intimidate employees into getting the vaccine.
  - Require employees to utilize their lunch time for vaccination without providing additional compensation break time. All state and federal labor laws regarding break time must be followed.
  - Ignore or criticize workers fears, worries, and mistrust about the vaccine or tell them that they are wrong.
  - Repeat myths or incorrect information because people tend to remember repeated information. Rather provide and repeat correct information.

## Vaccination and COVID-19 Resource Library

Resources on COVID-19 workplace health and safety and vaccine access are available in dozens of languages, in the forms of posters, fact sheets, videos, and social media posts. Shared below is a collection of these resources, including customizable templates for use by CBOs and employers engaging RIM communities –

- [CDC Sector-Specific Workplace Guidance](#) that includes FAQs for businesses and considerations for employers re-opening their worksites
- [Post-Vaccine Considerations for Employers](#) provides guidance for businesses whose employees have been vaccinated and how to navigate any post-vaccine health considerations that might arise



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- In-Language [Get Vaccinated Posters for Workplaces](#), by NRC-RIM, promoting the COVID-19 vaccine adoption
- In-Language [COVID-19 Fact Sheets](#), by NRC-RIM, for workplaces sharing accurate information on COVID-19
- [Vaccine Central](#), by NRC-RIM, hosts information for CBOs, employers and individuals on overcoming barriers to vaccination due to cultural factors, knowledge and beliefs about a disease or vaccine and healthcare access



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