

COVID-19 MANDATES: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HAWAI'I BUSINESSES

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AUTHORS

RUBEN JUAREZ, PH.D. DR. JUAREZ IS A PROFESSOR IN ECONOMICS & UHERO RESEARCH FELLOW. HE IS ALSO THE DIRECTOR OF DATA & EVALUATION AT THE PACIFIC ALLIANCE AGAINST COVID-19. DR. JUAREZ STUDIES SOCIOECONOMIC NETWORKS, INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR AND LEADS SEVERAL IMPACT EVALUATIONS WITH ORGANIZATIONS THROUGHOUT THE STATE.

ALIKA MAUNAKEA, PH.D. DR. MAUNAKEA IS AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IN EPIGENETICS AT THE JOHN A. BURNS SCHOOL OF MEDICINE. HE IS ALSO THE DIRECTOR OF COVID-19 TESTING CAPACITY AT THE PACIFIC ALLIANCE AGAINST COVID-19. DR. MAUNAKEA STUDIES EPIGENETICS, HEALTH DISPARITIES, AND IMMUNOLOGY AND HAS AMPLE EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH COMMUNITY.

MAY OKIHIRO, M.D. DR. OKIHIRO IS AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IN PEDIATRICS AT THE JOHN A. BURNS SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND A SENIOR PEDIATRICIAN AT THE WAI'ANAE COAST COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH CENTER. SHE IS ALSO THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT THE PACIFIC ALLIANCE AGAINST COVID-19. DR. OKIHIRO STUDIES PEDIATRICS POPULATION, HEALTH DISPARITIES AND HAS AMPLE EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES IN HAWAII.

CARL BONHAM, PH.D. DR. BONHAM IS THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII ECONOMIC RESEARCH ORGANIZATION AND PROFESSOR IN ECONOMICS. HIS RESEARCH INCLUDES MACROECONOMICS, APPLIED ECONOMETRICS, FORECASTING, TOURISM ECONOMICS, AND THE HAWAII ECONOMY.

DATA AND RESEARCH SUPPORT BY PAAC ANALYTICS TEAM: NICOLE SIEGAL, PH.D. STUDENT; BINH LE, PH.D. STUDENT; KRIT PHANKITNIRUNDORM, PH.D.; RANGRANG ZHENG, PH.D. STUDENT; KANG ZHENG, PH.D. STUDENT

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT PLEASE CONTACT:

RUBEN JUAREZ, RUBENJ@HAWAII.EDU DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS AND UHERO, UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII 2424 MAILE WAY, SAUNDERS 542, HONOLULU HI 96822

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Index

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
BACKGROUND	6
Survey on Business Mandates	7
SURVEY RESULTS	8
Description of businesses and organizations completing the survey	8
Mandate for employees to be vaccinated	11
Mandates for unvaccinated employees to be tested regularly	16
Mandates for vaccine passports or negative tests from clients	21
Business Needs and Further Comments	26
APPENDIX: Sector-specific summaries	30
Automotive Services (N=19)	30
Food and Beverage (N=141)	32
Health Services (N=173)	34
Personal Services (N=71)	36
Professional Services (N=72)	38
Tourism and Events (N=26)	40

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Faced with the largest increase in cases since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hawaii needs effective solutions that would reduce the number of cases disproportionately ravaging communities in the state. In August 2021, the <u>University of</u> <u>Hawaii Economic Research Organization</u> and the <u>Pacific Alliance Against COVID-19</u> (PAAC) conducted a representative survey of businesses and community organizations in the state to (1) understand their willingness to adopt restrictions at their workplaces for employees and customers and (2) understand barriers to effectively execute these restrictions if implemented.

884 businesses participated in the survey, with over 95% of them located all over Oahu. Most businesses in the survey had ten or fewer employees (73.4%). Over 20 sectors in the survey were represented, ranging from tourism, retail, and food and beverage to smaller offices, real estate, and non-profit organizations. The main survey findings include:

- <u>Vaccination rates</u>: Most businesses and organizations report a *large proportion of vaccinated employees*. Over 80% of businesses in our survey report over 80% of their employees have been fully vaccinated. The largest businesses of 50 or more employees reported the lowest proportion of vaccinations at their workplaces.
- <u>Vaccination mandate:</u> 64.5% of businesses reported that they *already do or likely will require employees to be vaccinated*. Over one-third of the businesses already requiring vaccination of employees, and an additional 15.1% are unsure or still deciding. Main reasons why employers do not consider a vaccination mandate include: employee resistance, personal preference of employer, belief that it is not legal or constitutional to mandate vaccination, and that it is not their organization's responsibility to do so. Of the businesses that *already do or likely will* impose a vaccine mandate, 80% report that they do so to increase safety at work, protect employees, protect customers, protect the community, and decrease the spread of COVID-19 in the state.
- <u>Testing mandate</u>: 60.6% of businesses responded that they already do or likely will require unvaccinated employees to be regularly tested for COVID-19. An additional 18.5% of businesses reported that they are unsure or still deciding. The main reasons why employers would consider testing mandates are similar to that of vaccination mandates.
- <u>Vaccine passport or negative test from clients:</u> Only 35.5% of businesses have already in place or likely will require a vaccine passport or negative test from clients. Nearly half of businesses (48.5%) reported that they would not impose this requirement on their clients or customers. An additional 15.9% of businesses have not made a decision about this policy. Customer resistance, logistical feasibility,

personal preferences, and perceived business disadvantages were the main reasons for businesses unwilling to impose this restriction.

 <u>Business needs remain</u>: Nearly 50% of businesses in the survey request COVID-19 education for employees, 28% need more information and guidance on COVID-19 regular testing for employees, and 23% need guidance on vaccination events for employees.

Based on the results of this survey compounded by the expanding number of cases among unvaccinated individuals, and reasons/behaviors of unvaccinated individuals, our research team recommends the following:

- <u>Vaccination and regular testing for employees:</u> Businesses must adopt vaccination and regular testing for unvaccinated individuals as early as possible.
- <u>Increase of COVID-19 testing:</u> The State of Hawaii should increase and support community testing at a larger scale.
- <u>Clear guidance for businesses:</u> The State of Hawaii should provide clear guidance and education for businesses that would encourage employee vaccination and testing, COVID-19 education, and testing modalities for businesses that would minimize risk at workplaces.
- <u>Accessible educational materials for employees:</u> The State of Hawaii should create accessible educational materials that reach employees of all literacy levels related to COVID-19 vaccination benefits, regular testing, and instructions on what to do when workers are sick and/or test positive for COVID-19.
- <u>Coordination with vaccine providers:</u> Vaccine providers should coordinate vaccination events for businesses and community organizations with the largest rates of unvaccinated individuals.
- <u>Mandatory vaccine passports for high-risk businesses:</u> The State of Hawaii should mandate vaccine passports in high-risk businesses. Correct guidelines and infrastructure must be provided to minimize customer resistance, logistic issues and make the vaccine passport requirement sector-specific to decrease putting businesses at a disadvantage.

BACKGROUND

As of late August 2021, Hawaii has become an infection hotspot, with COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations at all-time highs. With a 7-day moving average reaching almost 700 cases per day, this represents a 170% increase from the number of cases at the peak of the pandemic almost a year ago.

To date, over 72% of eligible individuals 12+ years or older have received a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, and 82% of individuals have received at least one dose. While we once led the nation in vaccination rates, to latest data is not in our favor, pushing Hawaii down the list of the top 20 states in the US.

The delta variant is now responsible for almost all the new cases in the U.S. and is more virulent than the original COVID-19 viral strain. Compared to those infected by the original strain, individuals infected by the delta variant harbor over 1000 times higher viral load and are infectious two days earlier, which results in substantially higher transmission rates. There is early evidence that this strain and less predominant new strains are capable of evading some of the protective ability of the available mRNA vaccines, resulting in recent increases in breakthrough COVID-19 cases. Together, these data indicate that an increased effort is needed to identify infectious individuals at the earliest stage possible to reduce transmission in the community. With the waning vaccination efficacy, the higher transmissibility and viral load presented by the delta variant will increase the number of asymptomatic carriers that contribute to viral spread yet remain undetected due to limitations imposed by current COVID-19 testing criteria. This will have adverse impacts on both unvaccinated as well as vaccinated individuals. Indeed, about 10% of new hospitalizations due to COVID-19 are among vaccinated individuals. We also anticipate the need for boosters, not just for the immunocompromised as is currently made available, but for the general population as well. It is likely that regular rounds of vaccinations that more effectively protect against the delta and other variants of concern, like strategies of preventing flu outbreaks, will be needed in the next phase to dampen the recurrent surges of COVID-19 and reduce hospitalizations.

The complexity of this crisis is compounded by geographic and ethnic disparities in the vaccination rates in Hawaii. While some regions in Hawaii reached over 70% completed vaccinations, other regions such as Waianae or Wahiawa have reached less than 35% among eligible individuals. Recent results of the Pacific Alliance Against COVID-19 (www.paac.info), which primarily serves the Waianae community, clearly indicate that vaccine access is not a significant contributor to these disparities. Instead, differences between vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals are primarily driven by trust and sources of information. Compared to vaccinated individuals, those unvaccinated are far less likely to *trust institutions (e.g., government or COVID-19 taskforce)* far less yet consume/use social media as their primary source of news information. These data implicate deep-seated issues that are systemic and will take a long time to be addressed even with the extensive education and media campaigns already in place. Given the dire situation in the state, more effective public health policies that have faster effects should be considered.

Putting this together, there is an urgent need to address two seemingly independent yet interrelated problems: (1) identify breaking through cases among some vaccinated before they continue spreading the virus in the community, and (2) increase the vaccination uptake in vaccine-resistant communities in Hawaii.

Given the urgency of addressing vaccine hesitancy, these problems could only be addressed in a timely manner by minimizing the interactions between vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals at higher risk of COVID-19.

Survey on Business Mandates

Although the effectiveness of mandates to encourage vaccination combined with regular COVID-19 testing should still be quantified, there is preliminary evidence from data collected by our PAAC team that this strategy has worked in school-based settings. However, to date, there has not been clear evidence of how effective this approach may be in business settings, especially in those businesses located in areas with low vaccination rates.

To address this shortage of information, in August 2021, the University of Hawaii Economics Research Organization and the Pacific Alliance Against COVID-19 conducted a representative survey of businesses and community organizations in the state to (1) understand their willingness to adopt restrictions at their workplaces for employees and customers and (2) understand barriers to effectively execute these restrictions if implemented.

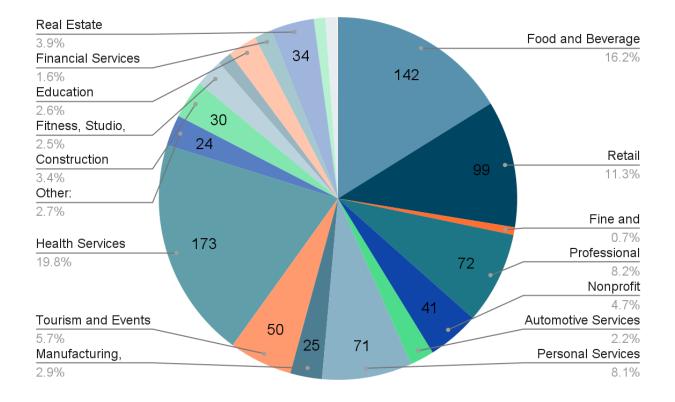
The brief 5-minute survey to businesses and organizations focused on five topics: (1) compliance with Hawaii Department of Health Recommendations, (2) willingness to impose vaccination mandates to employees, (3) willingness to impose testing for unvaccinated employees, (4) willingness to adopt a vaccine passport or testing for clients, and (5) additional information that businesses needed.

For categories (2), (3), and (4), we further asked businesses for the reasons that motivated them to adopt these restrictions. For those businesses unlikely or unsure to adopt these restrictions, we asked why they were not to adopt them.

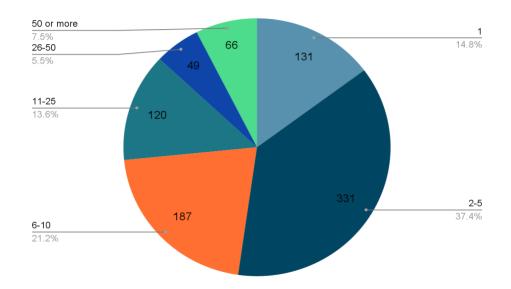
SURVEY RESULTS

Description of businesses and organizations completing the survey

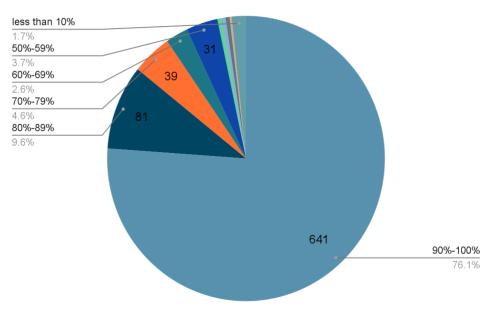
Business sectors. The survey respondents included over 20 business sectors in Hawaii. The largest categories were Health Services and Food and Beverage. Sectors that are most likely to interact with tourists coming to the state include Tourism and Events, Food and Beverage, and Retail, which together account for 33.2% of those surveyed.



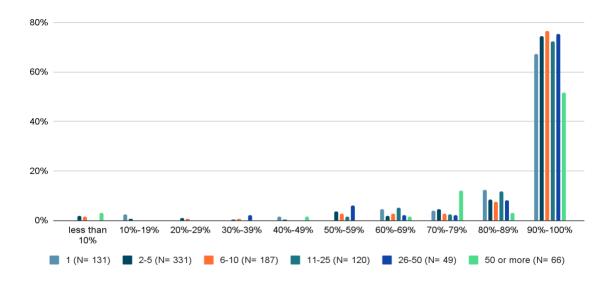
Size of businesses. Most businesses in the survey had ten or fewer employees (73.4%), with over a third of the respondents having 2-5 employees. While businesses with 50 or more employees accounted for a small portion of the survey respondents, they may represent a fairly large number of employees that will be impacted by the policy decisions made.



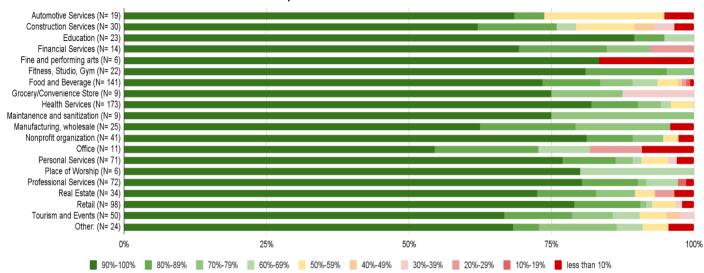
Vaccination rates among businesses participating in the study. Over two-thirds of the surveyed businesses reported that 90-100% of their employees were vaccinated. 84.7% reported that 80% or more of their employees were vaccinated.



For every business-size category, the majority reported 90-100% of their employees were vaccinated. No statistically significant difference was observed in vaccination rates among businesses with less than 50 employees. Businesses with 50 or more employees had the lowest reported proportion in this category, with 51.51% reporting 90-100% vaccination. However, two-thirds of the businesses with 50 or more employees reported that 70% or more of their employees were vaccinated.

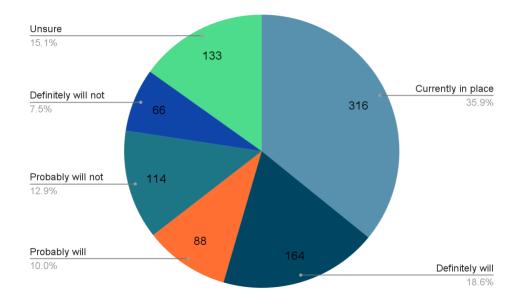


Vaccination rates across sectors. Heterogeneity of vaccination rates across sectors was observed. The sectors with the largest shares of vaccinated individuals, in the 90-100% vaccinated employees, were Fine and Performing Arts and Health Services (83.33% and 81.5%, respectively). Every sector-group had a majority reporting the highest vaccination level. The category with the lowest vaccination amount in this level was Tourism and Events, with only 56% reporting 90-100% vaccination. However, 72% of those in Tourism and Events reported vaccination rates of 70% and above.

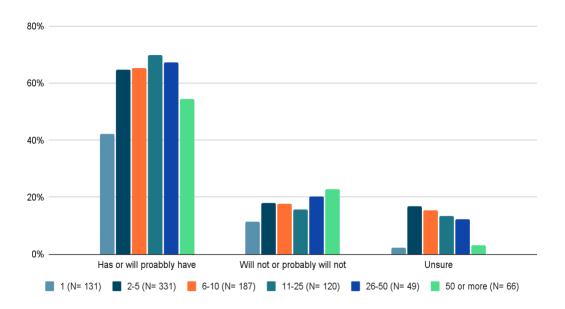


Mandate for employees to be vaccinated

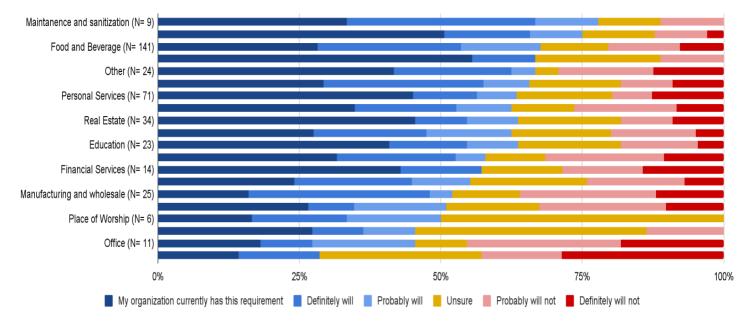
Almost two in three businesses in our survey reported that they already require or likely will require employees to be vaccinated, with the most frequent response of over one-third being that this is already required.



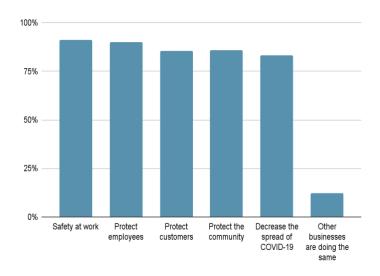
All business-size categories had a majority respond that they already or will probably require employees to be vaccinated. However, businesses with 50 or more employees had the highest proportion reporting that they will not or probably will not require vaccinations, which may represent a policy choice for many employees of larger businesses.



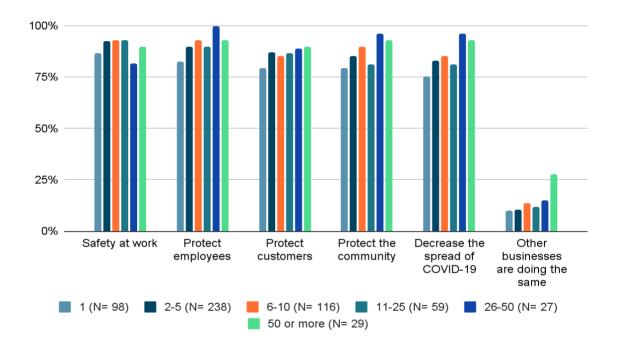
Most sectors had a majority of businesses report that they already do or plan to require employees to be vaccinated. The sectors with the highest proportions reporting in this way were Maintenance and Sanitation and Health Services (78% and 75% respectively). Four sectors had less than 50% of respondents report this policy; they are Place of Worship (49%), Fitness, Studio, or Gym (45%), Office (45%), and Fine and Performing Arts (33%).

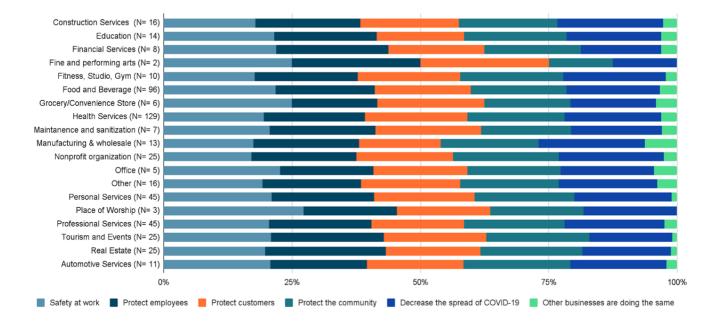


Among employers who already have a vaccination mandate or those who are likely to impose it, we asked the reasons they do so. Among them, 75% responded that safety at work, protection for employees, protection for customers, protection of the community, and to decrease the spread of COVID-19 were the main drivers for their decision to mandate vaccinations.

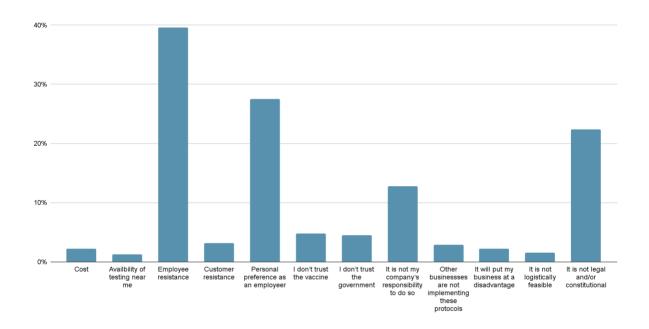


The reasons for imposing such vaccination mandate were fairly homogeneous in size and by the business sector.

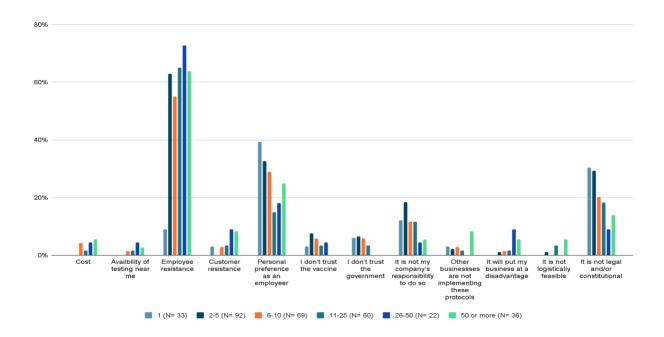


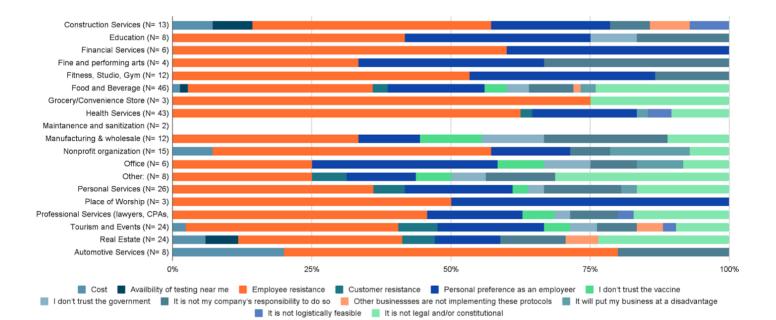


The main reason for businesses not to impose a vaccine mandate is due to employee resistance (39%). Other reasons include personal preferences as an employer (28%), questioning the legality and/or constitutionality of the mandate (22%), and not being the companies/business's responsibility (12%).



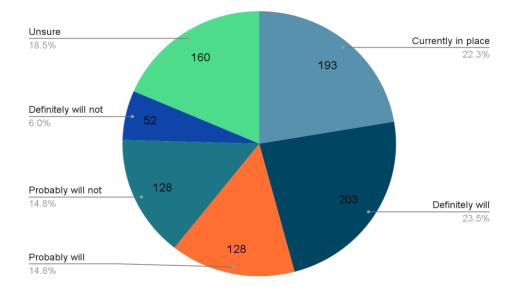
Slight variability in the responses exists across size, and significant variability exists across business sectors for not imposing the vaccine mandate in their businesses.



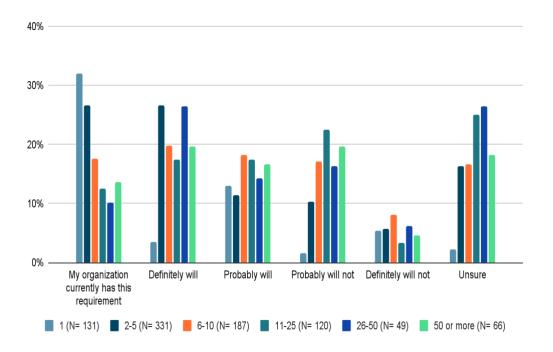


Mandates for unvaccinated employees to be tested regularly

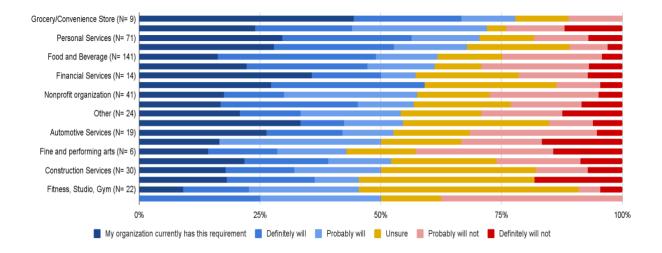
Most businesses responded that they already do or likely will require unvaccinated employees to be regularly tested for COVID-19 (60.6%). A large portion (18.5%) reported that they are unsure about instating this policy.



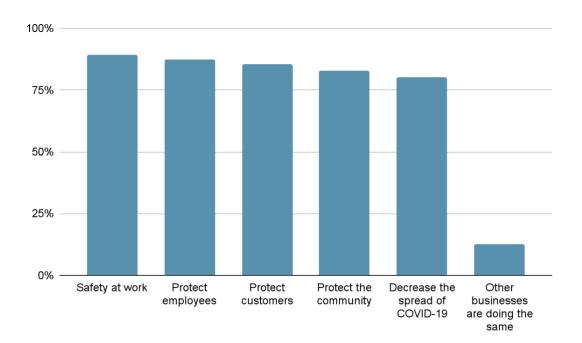
Every size-group had most businesses report that they will or do have a testing requirement for unvaccinated employees. Notably, smaller businesses (1-5 employees) reported the lowest proportions who are unsure or probably will not have this testing mandate.

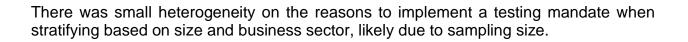


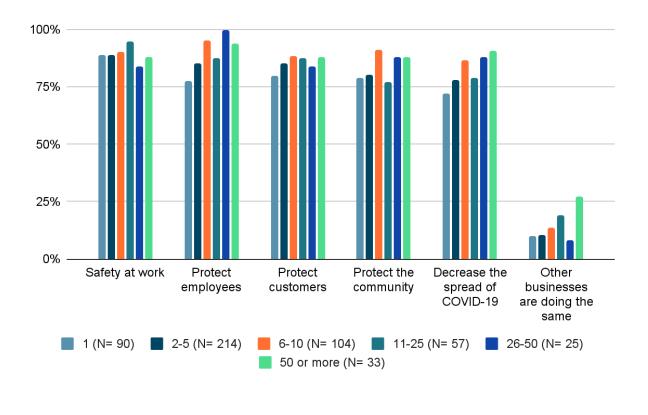
Most business sectors had high rates of testing policies, with the highest proportion sectors being Grocery/Convenience Stores (78%) and Manufacturing, Wholesale, and Distribution (72%). Seven sectors had less than 50% of respondents report that they will or do have this testing requirement, with Maintenance and Sanitation having the highest proportion that will not instate this policy of 33.33%.

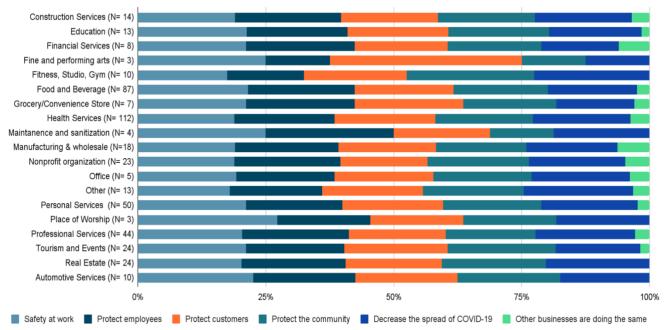


Similar to the vaccine mandate, there were four main reasons for a testing mandate for unvaccinated employees. Over 75% of employees responded that safety at work, protection for employees, protection for customers, protection of the community, and to decrease the spread of COVID-19 were the main drivers for their decision to impose the vaccination mandate.

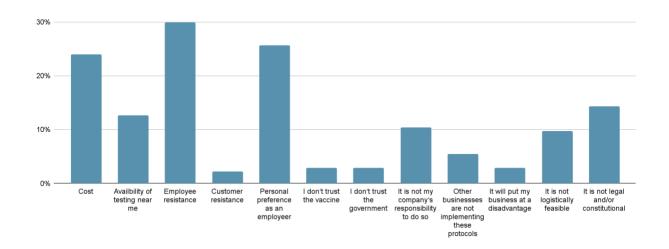




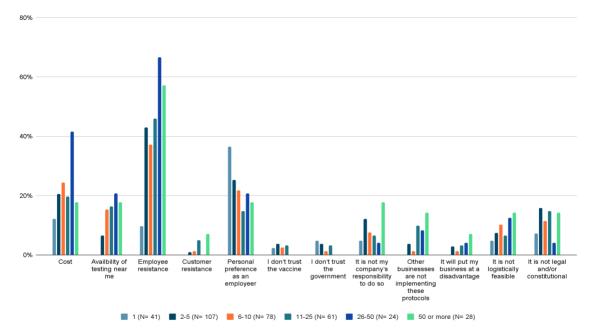




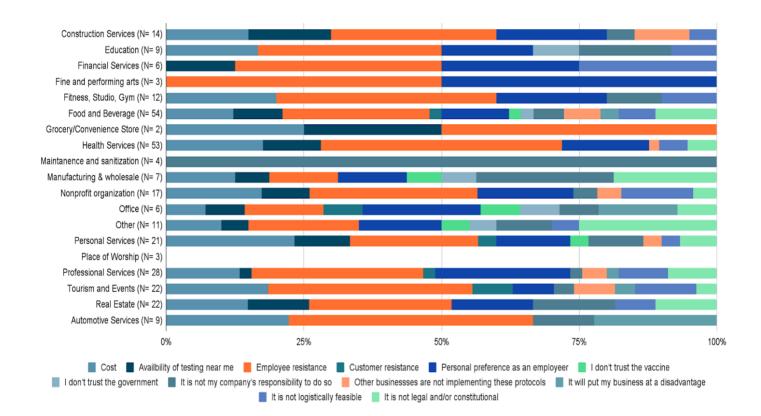
The main reasons for businesses not to impose a testing mandate included those similar to those of vaccine mandates, such as employee resistance (30%), personal preferences as an employer (25%), and questioning the legality and/or constitutionality of the mandate (15%). However, in addition to these reasons, cost (24%), availability of testing near the employer's place of work (12%) and logistics (9%) were other concerns.



Heterogeneity of these reasons was observed based on the size of the business, especially for businesses with 25-50 and 50+ employees in comparison to smaller businesses with less than 24 employees.

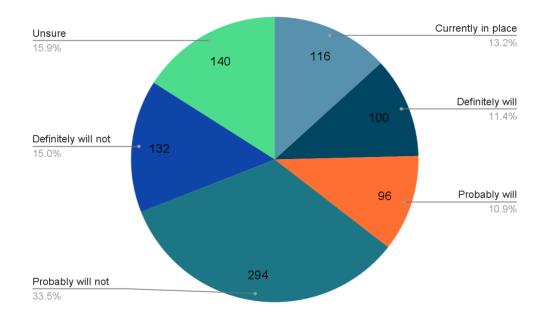


This heterogeneity persisted across business sectors and is further separated in the appendixes.

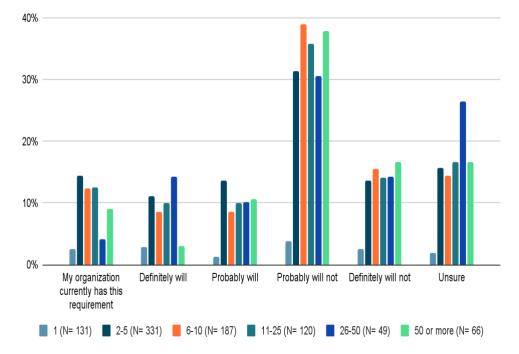


Mandates for vaccine passports or negative tests from clients

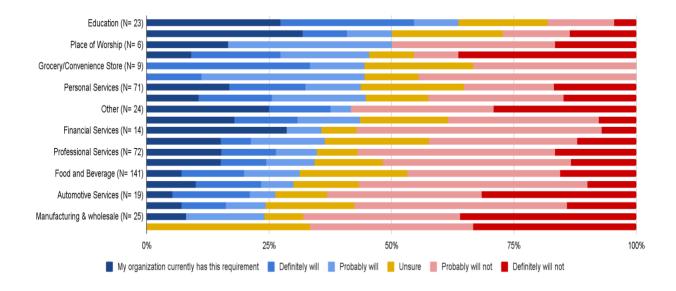
Nearly half of businesses (48.5%) reported that they would not require proof of vaccination or a recent negative COVID-19 test from their clients or customers. An additional 15.9% are unsure about this policy.



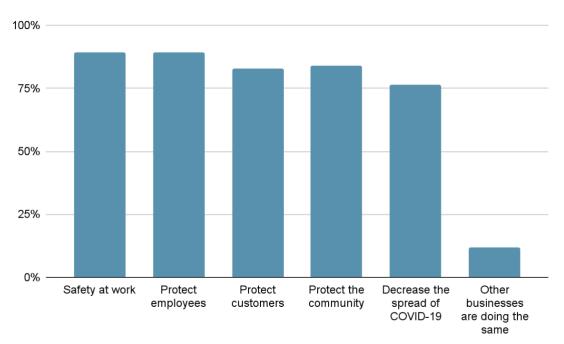
Every business sizecategory had a majority of responses reporting that they will not have this requirement of clients. Surprisingly, large businesses of 50 or more employees had the highest proportion (54.53%) reporting that they will not have this requirement.

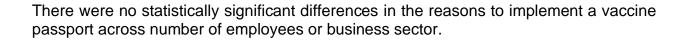


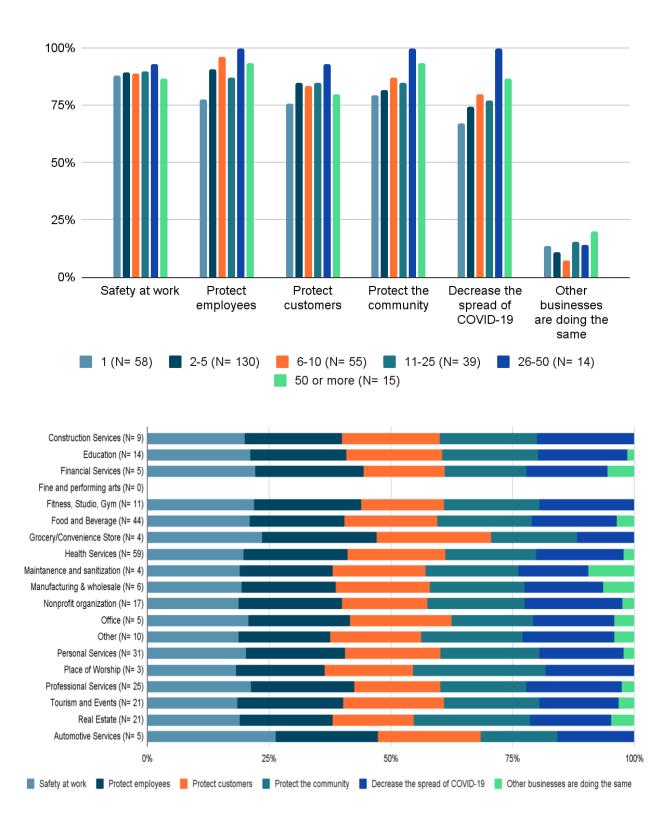
The only sectors with 50% or more of respondents reporting that they do or will require clients to be vaccinated or recently tested were Education (60.85%) and Fitness, Studio, Gym (50%). 100% of respondents for Fine and Performing arts reported that they would not have this requirement.



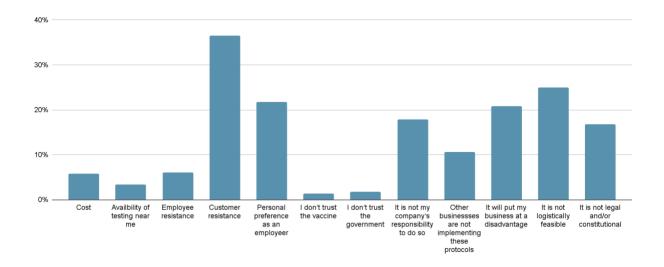
Similarly to the vaccine and testing mandates, among employers who require or are likely to require a vaccine passport or negative covid-19 test, 75% responded that safety at work, protection for employees, protection for customers, protection of the community, and to decrease the spread of COVID-19 were the main drivers for their decision to impose the vaccination mandate.



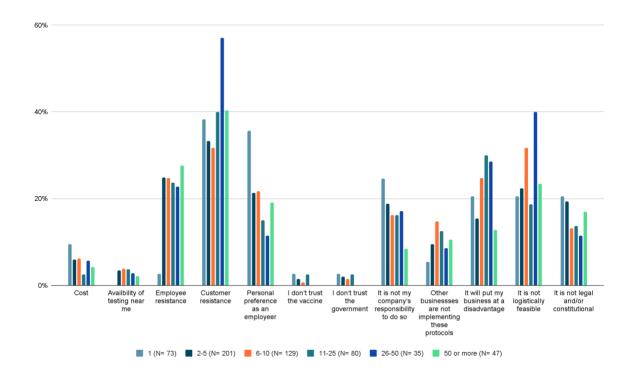




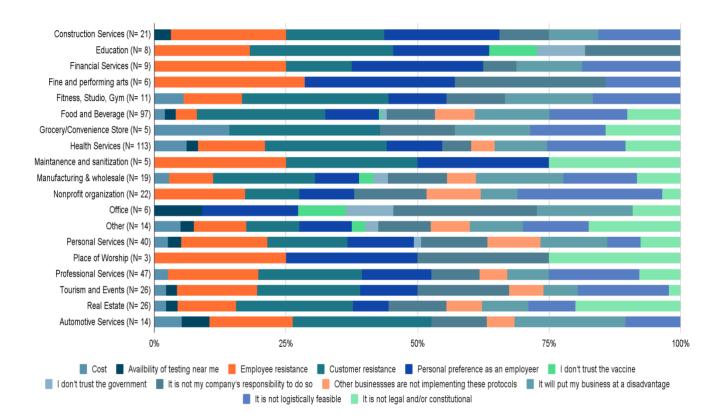
The main reason for businesses not to impose a vaccination passport for customers include customer resistance (35%), not being logistically feasible (25%), personal preferences as an employer (22%), putting the business at a disadvantage (21%), not being the company's responsibility do so (19%) and questioning the legality and/or constitutionality of the requirement (18%).



Heterogeneity of the reasons for not implementing the vaccine passport is observed in the size of the business, especially for businesses with 25-50 employees in comparison to other businesses.

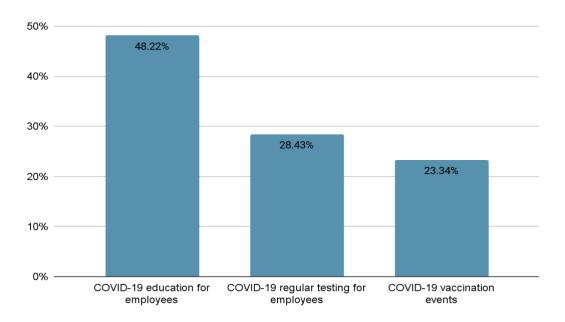


This heterogeneity persisted across business sectors and is further separated in the appendixes.



Business Needs and Further Comments

In addition to mandates, we asked businesses to provide for their needs. 48.22% of businesses indicated that they would like to receive COVID-19 education for employees. 28.43% indicated the need to learn more about methods and protocols for regular testing of employees. In addition, 23.34% indicated their willingness to learn more about COVID-19 vaccination events for their employees.



There were polarized very responses and comments from businesses regarding mandates. businesses While uniformly that vaccination agreed of employees and customers was important, they differed on the protocol to achieve the safety of customers and employees.



Although we received hundreds of comments from all spectrums, we included a few dozen comments to provide additional context. These comments do not necessarily reflect the views of the investigators.

I am a tiny business and look forward to the larger business community requiring the vaccine for their employees because this would make it easier for me to require the same.

Company is very small. Employees understand why the protocol was set up.

We are a small company and family on top of that. We talk about everything good and bad so I have been kept very well informed about contact outside of our bubble. I feel confident that my staff/employees are being mindful of exposing themselves.

Currently my Covid-19 testing costs me \$110. It has the convenience of allowing me to self administer in-office. I would like to know of a convenient more cost-effective means if possible. Mahalo!

Should have people go out in the private sector and ask if they want to get vaccination in a mobile clinic outside their work space.

There should be a statewide mandate for everyone to be vaccinated, including anyone who visits the state.

The vaccine is a personal choice. It's available for free for anyone who wants it. If you choose not to take the vaccine you choose to take your chances with COVID. We have no right to force another person to take the vaccine nor should we discriminate against customers who choose not to.

Government has to mandate the vaccine for all businesses, then it would take the pressure off each business owner/entity.

We required mandatory COVID vaccines since April 2021. Since most of our employees are Filipino with limited English, we initiated a group vaccine day with HPH. We filled out registration for them, paid our employees to get vaccine, drove them there. "I owned coffee shop and face so many different types of customers. Customers who don't believe covid, almost impossible convince them"

As a business owner, it is not feasible to require a negative proof or vaccination requirement since many people will give a false answer or will not indulge in personal information, hence the difficulty in contact tracing. However, our team is instructed to provide 100% cooperation if required. Mahalo Nui Loa for your kokua.

I am all for keeping my employees, customers and business safe, but with respect to everyone's rights as well what type of negative impact it could have on my business overall. We are still trying to recover and forcing people to do something they do not want to do could have a negative impact over the long run.

Our business is about ""get in get out"" and this only slows down the process to the customer. This could eventually have them taking their business somewhere else, unless all gas stations in the state follow the same rules and regulations... The delta variant is bad! I personally know several people that were fully vaccinated and contracted positive COVID and experienced symptoms. The vaccine may help- but its not full proof. Also, everyone not vaccinated WILL get the variant.

We are looking into implementing an in-house COVID testing protocol. We have seen online that there are new testing devices that use saliva and can provide results within a hour or less. That would help us deal with the workers who refuse vaccinations. But a better, less costly alternative for us would be for the state to continue the free testing because the DELTA variant is wreaking havoc on the community,

A statewide requirement for restaurant workers to be vaccinated would be much appreciated. Guidance on implementing policies. E.g. should there be a timeline? If employee refuses, ask them to resign? terminate them?

We choose not to require vaccinations or negative COVID tests because we believe in freedom of choice and religious beliefs

I, as a manager, personally support a frequent consistent required testing policy for our state and businesses (that have a substantial level of public interaction), in order to understand how COVID-19 is being transmitted though our community.

All our employees by choice are vaccinated. We practice all covid 19 protocols within our business. It is not reasonable in our business to have to check all our guests daily. All we can do is our part. Every guest needs to take responsibility for all of us to move forward.

I hear about too many different stories about the vaccine and the virus. I'm very confused. Every story contradicts another. Very depressing.

Are there any free to low-cost, in-home COVID-19 test kits available in Hawaii? This will ease the employees' burden of the inconvenience of going to the test sites.

I will follow government mandates and have no problem requiring vaccinations and/or testing of employees if asked to do so.

I think requiring proof of vaccination is a draconian idea that fits more in line with dictatorships. Let the marketplace decide.

If customers don't feel safe they will not shop at a business, we business owners do not need more government help.

They did enough damage to small business owners in 2020 and now need to get out of the way and let the American economy do what it does so well. Determine winners and losers without government heavy handedness from those who don't know how to run businesses

Thank you for doing an awesome job during this pandemic to keep us all safe and alive. Situation will improve and transcend into new normal as everything is always changing, nothing stays the same.

We would love to see legislation pass requiring vaccinations for customers and employees.

All of my employees are vaccinated. If I am to hire more later, vaccination will be required.

We are a work force of three persons and cannot afford to lose one if we mandate vaccinations and one refuse. We mainly service equipment and are on a military base that requires department of defense protocols.

It's impossible to expect small business owners & operators to impose the same level of testing as large organizations unless testing & access is nearly free & immediate.

We are curious about how to require new hires to get/be fully vaccinated. Or if not, how to request regular testing. We are unsure of the legalities of this and which testing location(s) to send them to.

Vaccination is not the only answer, behavior modification, social distancing and mask wearing are valid too

Any and all the help from the government would greatly help small businesses. We are fortunate to have 98% of our staff vaccinated. But testing is limited to companies and its very costly. Have it available for business to access would great impact the spread in community.

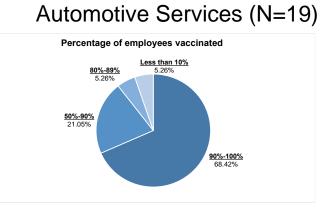
We respect every employee's personal choice. They are being responsible to our safety procedure of preparing foods and serving customers. But employers don't have rights to force employees to inject anything to their body. My employees are all vaccinated voluntarily because they believed the vaccines will protect them, not because the job required them to be vaccinated.

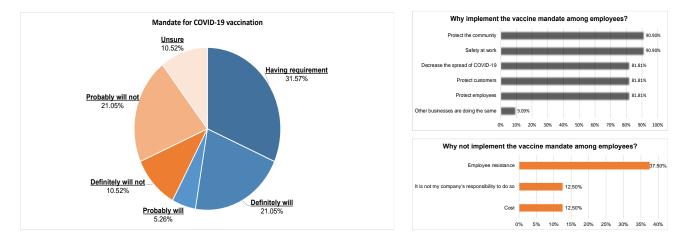
Business would thrive if government mandated the vaccine for all indoor activities. Once children are able to get vaccinated my business will finally recover. Once FDA approves it, I will be able to institute vaccination requirements with least resistance. My dance business has already suffered through Covid and I am desperate to move on from this pandemic. The mental and emotional toll it has taken on business owners having to mitigate the virus and trying to keep up with the ever-changing restrictions is too much. I will be relieved when I no longer have to anticipate the potential spread of the virus, restructure my business to follow state guidelines, and financial setbacks.

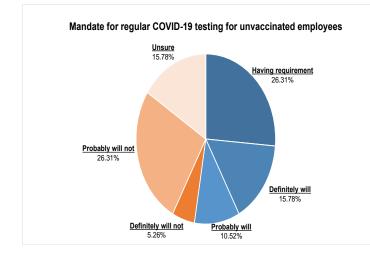
Government needs to require vaccination to enter any all buildings. Businesses don't need to be put at odds with their customers. Due to the pandemic and government restrictions, our businesses are already at financial risk. We need the support. If financial support is tapped out, then at least ethically support our establishments by requiring the vaccine for all.

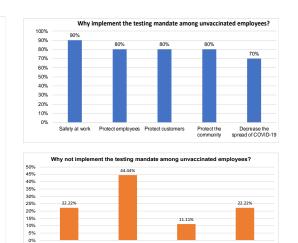
There is a concern regarding lack of sufficient staff. We cannot afford to lose employees by requiring vaccination. That said, we have a fairly high percentage of vaccinated employees but those that are hesitant are proving to be very difficult to convince.

APPENDIX: Sector-specific summaries







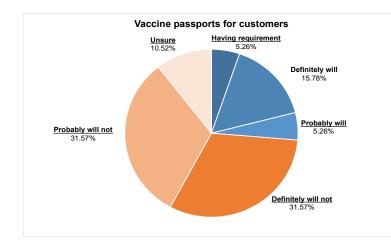


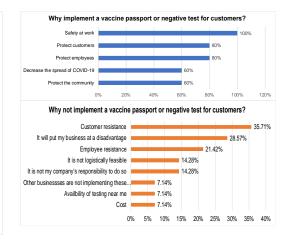
Not company's

It will put my business at a disadvantage

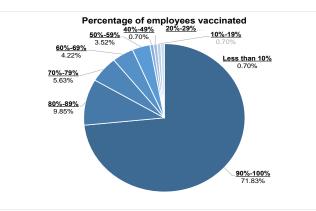
Cost

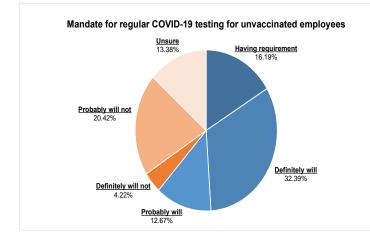
Employee resis

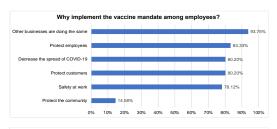




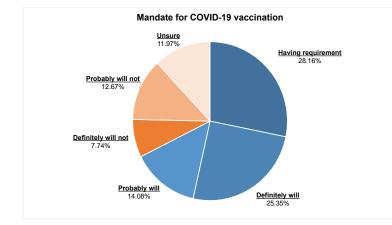
Food and Beverage (N=141)

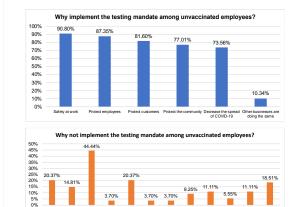




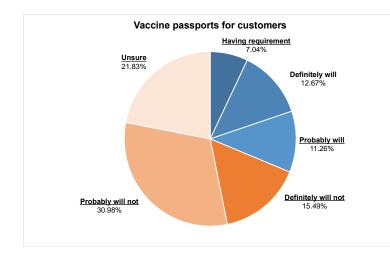


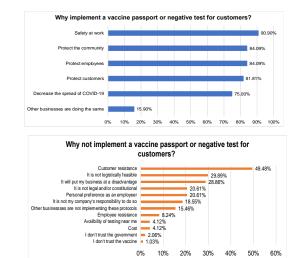




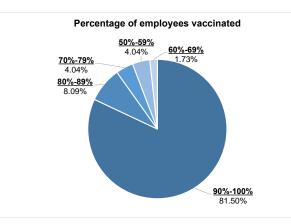


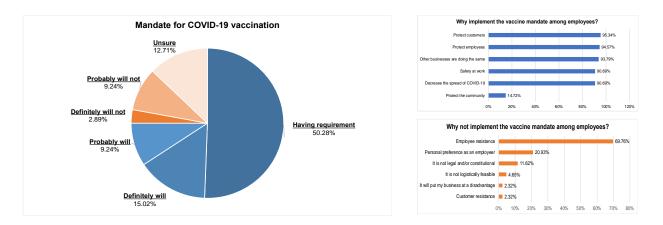
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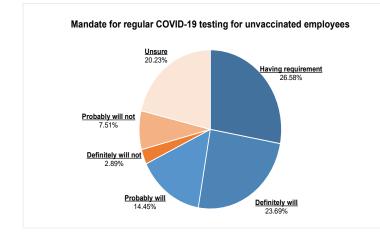


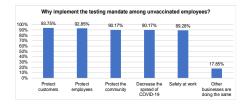


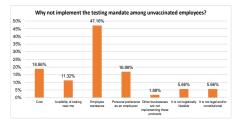
Health Services (N=173)

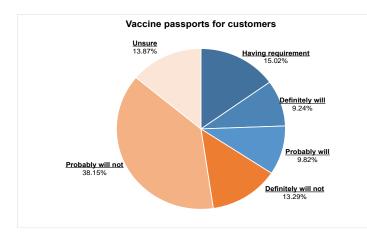


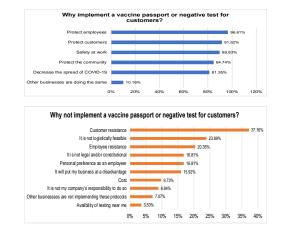




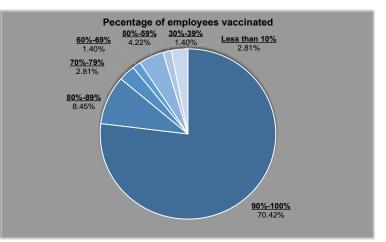


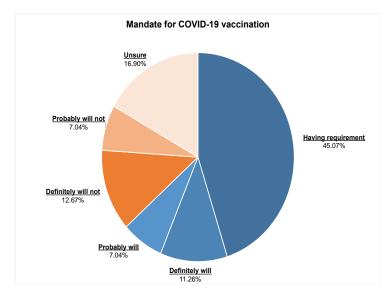


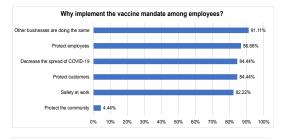


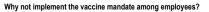


Personal Services (N=71)

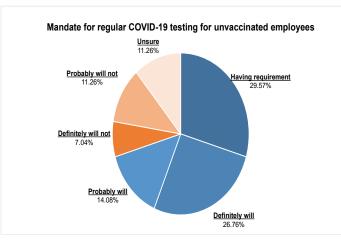


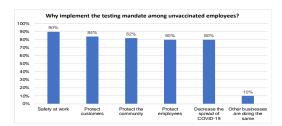


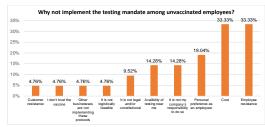


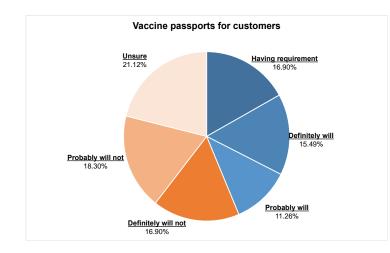


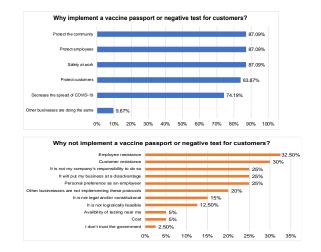




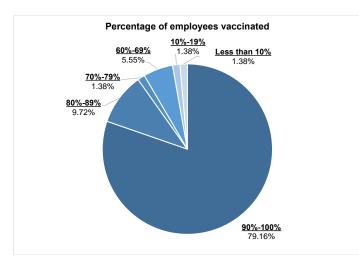


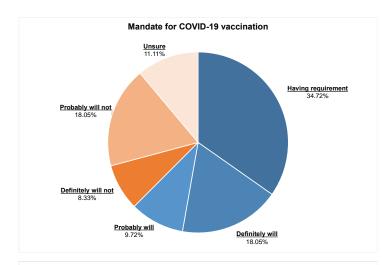


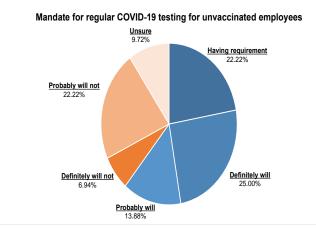


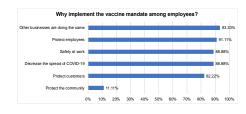


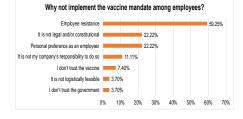
Professional Services (N=72)

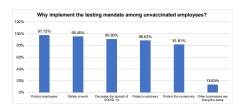


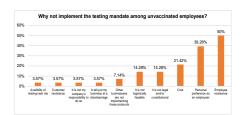


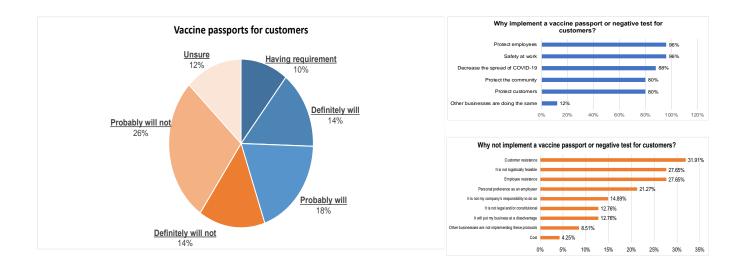


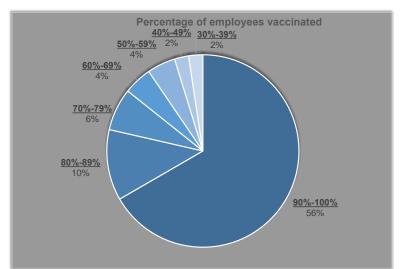




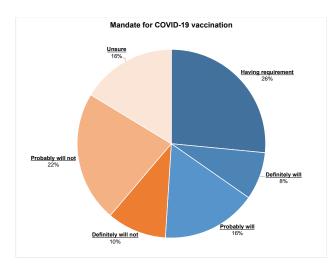


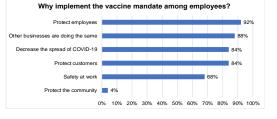






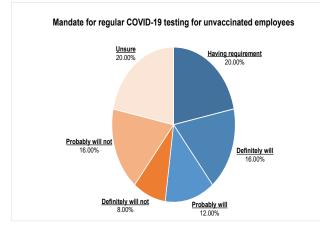
Tourism and Events (N=26)

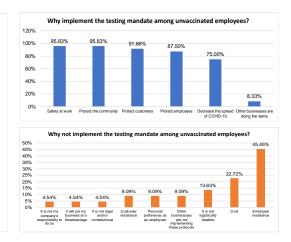


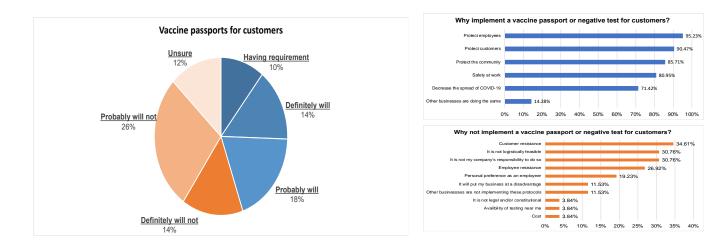


Why not implement the vaccine mandate among employees?









95.23%

90.47%

85.71%

80.95%

71.42%