

Getting back to business travel: South African employers' role in the Covid-19 vaccine roll-out

 By [Oz Desai](#)

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Although South Africa remains in the grip of the third wave of Covid-19 infections, the current acceleration of the vaccine roll-out is a positive sign that the tide will turn soon.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

Globally, there is general optimism about the return of business travel according to a new report from the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA). The report shows that employees are once again 'willing' – and even 'very willing' - to travel, thanks in a large part to the vaccine rollout and the introduction of vaccine passports.

South Africa's vaccine roll-out was slow to start, but we are now gaining positive momentum with those aged between 35 and 49 years now also set to be vaccinated.

South African employers have an important role to play in getting the workforce vaccinated and back onto the road. Besides the availability of vaccines, consumer confidence in the Covid-19 vaccines remains an obstacle. From beliefs that the vaccine would cause infertility to the fears that the vaccine is unsafe or that it could even alter your DNA, a lot of myths still prevail.

Employers can help set the record straight

A new report by McKinsey & Company shows that employers are uniquely positioned to support Covid-19 vaccine adoption. They can consider a set of actions that supports Covid-19-vaccine adoption among employees by building conviction and making vaccination as convenient and "costless" as possible.

In South Africa, labour minister Thulas Nxesi recently published a new directive focusing on Covid-19 and the workplace, outlining the health and safety protocols that businesses and employees are required to follow during the lockdown. For the first time, the regulations also deal with the issue of vaccinations and whether an employer can make them mandatory.

Whether or not companies want to take the road of mandatory vaccines, it is important to understand and address how employees perceive vaccination. Share resources and information to help educate the workforce, and address misconceptions.

South African employers have a direct channel of communication to their employees, which puts them in a unique position to cut through the noise and provide facts and information. Employers can facilitate an open dialogue with the local community or religious leaders, creating space to listen to employees and acknowledge any concerns.

What's more, it's important for senior leaders to set an example and show their willingness and intent to vaccinate. They should share their vaccination experiences and answer questions based on their first-hand experience.

Making vaccination as convenient as possible is another important enabler to support Covid-19-vaccine adoption. So, consider offering vaccinations on-site and offer paid time off for recovery as well as covering all direct costs related to vaccinations.

Beyond their own workforce, businesses can support vaccination more broadly by influencing supply-chain partners. Once the vaccine is more broadly available in South Africa, travel buyers could for example enquire whether the frontline staff at hotels is vaccinated.

As vaccine or health passports are being rolled out across the world, the vaccine is vital in the recovery of business travel and in getting our top South African executives back on the road. Vaccine passports will ease travel restrictions, and could even allow travellers to skip the unproductive quarantine requirements in many countries.

But that is not all. A recent analysis published by the World Bank shows that vaccinating 60% of South Africa's population against Covid-19 would have a benefit-cost ratio of more than 29. The economic benefits would be amplified even further by an accelerated vaccination roll-out.

"Countries that have been quick to vaccinate their population against Covid-19 and that are managing to control infections through effective public health strategies are seeing their economies recover more quickly. A fast rollout of vaccinations would lift business confidence and investment but failing to do so would harm the economy," said the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development in its latest Economic Outlook report.

All things considered, economists say South Africa's prospects look good, and things can only get better. So, let's roll up our sleeves, get the jab and get back to work. It will be all hands on deck if we want our economy to recover swiftly from the pandemic. As Nelson Mandela said: "It always seems impossible until it's done."

ABOUT OZ DESAI

With a proven track record in business management and finance, Oz Desai heads up Flight Centre Travel Group's dynamic Corporate Traveller brand in South Africa. Having worked in a retail travel, management and finance environment within the Flight Centre group, Desai's first-hand experience brings great depth to the role of positioning Corporate Traveller as the preferred provider of travel solutions to corporate South Africa.

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