

https://www.santafenewmexican.com/opinion/my_view/employer-flexibility-essential-during-pandemic/article_cc5cdc64-7feb-11ec-a524-03b21aa6ff33.html

MY VIEW GIOVANNA ROSSI AND GABRIEL SANCHEZ

Employer flexibility essential during pandemic

By Giovanna Rossi and Gabriel Sanchez

Jan 29, 2022

BSP Research from Aug. 16 to Sept. 1 conducted a statewide survey of New Mexico parents who have yet to vaccinate their children to better understand parents' attitudes toward vaccination of their kids. With the omicron variant identified in New Mexico and cases surging across the state, vaccination of children has become even more critical.

The survey found that 67 percent of parents are concerned they may need to miss work to get their children vaccinated or that the side effects may cause their children to miss school. Furthermore, 78 percent of parents said that having sick leave time from their employer, should their children have vaccine side effects, would make getting their children vaccinated easier. This data makes clear that concern among parents that they may have to take time off from work to care for their children if the side effects are significant is a major obstacle to wide-spread vaccination of our state's children.

It is important to consider that for many working families across the state, maintaining employment is a serious concern. A recent New Mexico Media Desk/BSP survey found that a large percentage of New Mexico residents have lost their job or had their work hours reduced during the pandemic. This makes working parents highly concerned about losing their jobs at a time when many are just starting to rebound from a very challenging year.

With the Healthy Workplaces Act set to go into effect in the coming year, workers in New Mexico will have added support, but flexibility for employees right now to be able to vaccinate their children will go a long way toward beating this pandemic. Employers have a lot to gain from increased vaccination rates, as this is the clearest path toward full economic recovery.

At Family Friendly New Mexico, a statewide nonprofit initiative, many of the employers are businesses that receive an award for their commitment to equitable health outcomes for their workforce and that offer related workplace policies. These policies include health support, work schedules, flexible schedules, economic support, diversity, equity and inclusion, and community investment.

Basin Home Health in Farmington, for instance, has a family-friendly workplace policy that offers as much time as required for employees to care for children's health appointments and related time for recovery at home. Basin encourages close communication between employees and their supervisors to be sure they know this flexibility is available to them. Further, Basin continues to encourage vaccination by posting free clinic times and locations in its employee Facebook groups and in its offices.

Another Family Friendly Business Award recipient, Sutin, Thayer & Browne APC, offers generous paid leave under its vacation and sick leave policies, and employees can choose to use this leave for the time off they need to care for their children. The firm supports parents and guardians to take the leave they need to get themselves and their loved ones vaccinated. Sutin also provides the ability to work from home should workers or their children not feel well.

We encourage other employers to take this same approach and help support wider vaccination of children across the state.

Giovanna Rossi is CEO, Collective Action Strategies LLC, founder of Family Friendly New Mexico and host of the Well Woman show. Gabriel R. Sanchez is a professor at the University of New Mexico Department of Political Science and founding Robert Wood Johnson Foundation chair in Health Policy at UNM.