

# Short-staffed employers should tap return-to-work COVID-19 trackers to contend with sick leave and long-term vacancies

Article

**The news:** Walgreens rolled out an interactive COVID-19 omicron variant tracker in collaboration with its laboratory testing partner **Aegis Sciences**, [per](#) a joint press release.

**Key details:**

- The tracker is based on proprietary data from PCR testing services conducted by Walgreens.
- Walgreens claims the tracker can identify the spread of the omicron variant within **24 to 48 hours**, faster than other methods like the CDC's tracker, which is updated whenever new data becomes available.

**The bigger picture:** Walgreens could become a primary resource for employers seeking the latest COVID-19 data to determine whether or not it's safe to return to work, for two key reasons:

**1. Employers will want to prepare for short-term staff shortages due to COVID-19.** The omicron variant has employees calling out sick in droves, which means large employers are scrambling to fill the staff gaps.

- For example, a **United Healthcare** exec recently said **one-third of its workforce** at Newark International Liberty Airport **called out sick in one day alone**.
- And **Macy's** has shortened its January hours to compensate for its worker shortages, according to NPR.
- Access to omicron data could help execs and managers plan how to readjust employee hours in preparation for rising COVID-19 cases and subsequent sick leave, for instance.

**2. The rise in COVID-19 cases could be correlated with long-term job vacancies.**

- The US labor market is **missing 1.6 million full-time workers** due to long COVID-19, [according to](#) The Brookings Institution's estimates.
- The effects of long COVID-19 can be debilitating, resembling a chronic condition and making it difficult to sustain long-term employment. The current known chronic effects due to COVID-19 include persistent headaches, extreme fatigue, and difficulty concentrating, per the CDC.

**Zooming out:** Some companies are planning to return to in-person or hybrid work sometime soon, which means along with COVID-19 trackers, return-to-work platforms could see a rise in adoption by employers this year.

For example, **Apple** is requiring both corporate and store employees to get the booster shot in addition to vaccinations in order to return to the workplace by Jan 24—and unvaccinated employees will have to show negative COVID-19 rapid test results.

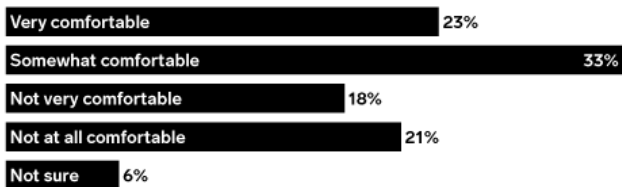
Companies restarting hybrid/in-person work models will need better systems in place to track booster shots and rapid tests, which makes tech platforms like Walgreens' COVID-19 tracker and **Verily's Healthy at Work** program attractive options for large employers.

- In fact, Verily claims through its Healthy at Work business, it was able to support employers and “millions” of people through COVID-19 testing, according to its president, **Vivian Lee, M.D., Ph.D.**, during a recent Fierce JPM Week interview.

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### How Comfortable Are US Adults with Their Employer Having Access to Their Personal Health Information\*?

% of respondents, April 2021



Note: ages 18-74; \*or vaccination information  
Source: Ipsos, "Global Views on Personal Health Data and Vaccine Passports," April 28, 2021

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