

Employee COVID 19 Testing and Immunization

COVID-19 has triggered chaos, frustration and depression. One and a half years after it made its presence felt, it continues to negatively impact on the lives of workers the world over. It has resulted in many workers having been displaced from their places of employment. Workers have suffered the indignity of having to struggle with their employer in an effort to receive severance payment which is due to them. On the other hand, some of those who were fortunate not to have suffered the fate of being placed on the breadline, now find themselves having to endure either shortened work hours or work week.

This is a miserable time for workers, as they have become vulnerable to the whims and fancies of employers. Employers now have greater latitude in exercising controls in the management of their enterprises. They can under the cover of the COVID-19 crisis, move to downsize and make changes that would have otherwise received push back from workers and their respective trade union organization. The unemployment woes have forced many to engage in economic activities that fall way short of their professional training. Many are faced with the horror of having to accept imposed changes on their conditions of work, and to do so if they are to remain employed. With few available job options, it is left for them to be engaged in what may be considered as substandard or precarious work, or to face the challenge of competing for the few scarce jobs that are available on the market.

Given the prevailing circumstances, it is more than likely that the vast majority of workers share in the hope that COVID-19 would hastily disappear. It would appear that this may just be wishful thinking. Members of the workforce may therefore want to ponder on what they can do return the business world and civil society to a sense of normalcy. Following on medical science, immunization against COVID-19 seems to be the immediate answer to restoring the world to the state which existed prior. Where there is a safe and healthy environment, chances are that social and economic life will be rejuvenated. The hard fact of the matter is that when it comes to immunization, the individual retains the right of choice to be or not to be vaccinated. It is a fundamental right that no employer should attempt to breach. The fact that the action of the individual is voluntary, this legally reduces any form of coercion on the part of the employer to require or demand an employee to be tested

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or immunized. The decision of the employee not to be immunized or to consent to be tested, presents a challenge for the employer who has an obligation and a responsibility under law to provide a safe place of work.

Similar to the employer, the employee has a responsibility to contribute to a safe place of work. With this in mind, it is left to each employee to make a determination and choice on whether to be immunized or tested against the coronavirus. It is an undisputed fact that both employers and employees are conscious that the spread of the virus can disrupt the operations of the workplace. The closure of the workplace and the quarantining of workers and their family members, may be necessitated as a consequence of a positive test result being returned by an employee or a family member. This can have a rippling effect in that it can be the catalyst for community spread of the virus.

Basically, the contraction of the virus can be said not to be an intentional act, but the consequences of having contracted the virus could be severe, as it places many others at risk. It must be understood that with a spike in the spread of the virus, the immediate consequence is a possible lock down of the country. Along with the fear of the loss of lives, there is the accompanying suffering of physiological stress, anxiety, trauma, frustration and depression that many will experience.

Getting back to work and returning to a sense of normalcy is a dream of the majority of the members of the workforce, but there must be an understanding that any wide spread fear against being tested and a level of immunized hesitancy, can reduce this outcome being realized in any short order. So far, immunization against the coronavirus has been recognized as the only medical response to control the spread of the virus. With there being no immediate alternative, it is left to each individual to make a wise choice. This choice is to be made with the understanding that to be tested or immunized would be a decisive step towards saving their own life, that of family members, reducing or eliminating mass loss of life, chaos and suffering within the community.

At this stage where there is hesitancy and fear of being immunized, the thought of any wide condemnation of individuals, will do little to inspire them to change their minds to take the vaccine. As it stands, moral persuasion remains the best option left to induce a change in the thinking of the vast majority of persons who are so far

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unwilling to be immunized. In the meantime, all is left to be done is to encourage those who are reluctant to be immunized, to comply with the health protocols. By the washing of hands, the wearing of mask in public spaces, including workplaces and observing social distances, we can reduce the spread of the virus and the incidence of mortality and death. There must however be a consciousness that without mass immunization which can lead to herd immunity, the return to the normalcy of life is unlikely to be a reality anytime soon. This leaves the population with the choice of making a decision of continuing to live in the constant fear of a raging virus, or to take the bold step of becoming immunized, so as to halt its fury.