

# The case for compulsory vaccination in the construction industry

By [Morag Evans](#)

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With only around 29% of South Africans vaccinated against Covid-19 (at time of writing) and the threat of a fourth wave of infections looming, the debate around mandatory vaccination in the workplace is heating up. There is, however, a case to be made for compulsory vaccinations in the construction industry.



Source: [www.unsplash.com](http://www.unsplash.com)

The Occupational Health and Safety Act stipulates that employers must provide and maintain a safe and healthy working environment, free from risk to employees. This includes putting measures in place to protect employees from infectious disease such as Covid-19. Owing to the nature of work carried out on construction sites, however, social distancing and other hygiene protocols can be difficult to implement and manage.

Consequently, the temptation to cut safety corners to meet tight project deadlines and budgets is very real, but failure by construction industry players to comply with Covid-19 hygiene regulations and protocols could lead to infection breakouts and site shutdowns, which the industry can ill afford.

Recent reports from the Bureau for Economic Research reveal that business confidence in the construction industry is at an all-time low, and many construction companies are struggling to stay afloat in the current bearish economic climate.



Compulsory Covid-19 vaccines?

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## Costs of an infection outbreak

While it is important to respect employees' right to refuse the vaccine on constitutional or medical grounds, these same employees must be made aware of the risk they pose to their colleagues by not being vaccinated. Not only are they placing their co-workers' health in jeopardy, but there are also the financial risks to consider. Dealing with an infection outbreak is costly – sick leave expenses, labour replacements, work delays or stoppages (depending on the severity of the on-site outbreak) can significantly impact the project budget.

With this in mind, a mandatory vaccination policy would go a long way towards mitigating the spread of infection on construction sites and help ensure that projects are delivered on time and within budget.

Statistical evidence is mounting that the vaccine plays a significant role in preventing hospitalisation and death related to Covid-19. Research done by Discovery indicates that vaccinated people are 'three times less likely to infect others, four times less likely to end up in high care/ICU and ten times less likely to die compared to unvaccinated individuals'.

In short, the vaccine saves lives, and regardless of whether employers are in favour of or against a mandatory vaccination policy, they have a moral and ethical responsibility to actively encourage their employees to have the vaccination.

## Dispelling conspiracy theories, myths

With vaccine hesitancy still a serious concern among South Africans, construction employers need to educate their employees on the benefits of the vaccine and the risks of not being vaccinated, including dispelling conspiracy theories and myths. Employers could invite healthcare professionals to address workforces and encourage employees to ask questions so that any concerns they have can be addressed.

The sooner South Africa's vaccination rollout is completed, the sooner all lockdown restrictions can be lifted and we can resume our pre-pandemic lives. The construction industry has an integral role to play in this regard. Employers are ideally positioned to address vaccine hesitancy among their employees and should work actively to advance vaccine adoption and accelerate South Africa's much-needed economic recovery.

## ABOUT MORAG EVANS

Morag Evans is CEO of Databuild.

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