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## **DLA Piper, Winston & Strawn Leaders Will Encourage Vaccines for Returning Employees**

Winston's chairman said his firm won't rule out mandating vaccines. But he and DLA Piper global co-chair are also far from requiring any return to the office.

By Dan Packel | February 25, 2021



***Tom Fitzgerald, left, and Frank Ryan, right. Courtesy photos***

Winston & Strawn chairman Thomas Fitzgerald would prefer to encourage that employees receive the COVID-19 vaccine. But he's not ruling out making vaccinations mandatory as the firm grapples with an eventual return to office life.

Law firm uncertainty surrounding vaccination policies was one critical theme that emerged from a roundtable discussion Wednesday hosted by commercial real estate services firm Savills on the future of the law firm office.

"I would hope that if the firm did what it needs to do to encourage our people—because we share a commitment to the firm and each other—that they would do that once it's generally available and absolutely safe and there's no other issues," Fitzgerald said of vaccinations.

But if that's not the case, he views receiving a COVID-19 shot as part of the same "social contract" that's promoted the firm to mandate mask-wearing, social distancing and hand washing for those who are currently in its spaces. At the same time, the fact that vaccines involve an injection into one's body puts them in a different category. The puzzle is made even more complicated by the fact that many employees who return to the office may want their colleagues to be vaccinated.

"I hope we don't get there. I think we can do it from an encouragement point of view," Fitzgerald continued, adding that any decision at his firm will emerge from a discussion at its most senior levels.

Fitzgerald was joined at the virtual event by DLA Piper global co-chair Frank Ryan, who praised his peer for the thoughtfulness of his response.

"We as leaders have an obligation to educate our people in the workforce. We have to live in a world where facts matter and science matters. I think there will be opportunities for us during the encouragement process," he said, noting the firm had already brought in experts to talk to personnel about the science behind the vaccines and the proof of their efficacy.

Ryan added that, having served as primary outside counsel to vaccine developer Pfizer, the firm did not arrive at the subject from a position of neutrality.

Ryan was also aligned with Fitzgerald on the idea that there's no rush to begin mandating a return to the office.

"We will not force people to come back. There will be a process where folks will start to voluntarily return," he said. "Different practices have different needs, and I think we have more flexibility by using work from home and virtual workspaces."

The pair also addressed the long-run ramifications of the current moment of upheaval, agreeing that the dislocations of the pandemic would have a revolutionary effect on the legal profession.

Ryan emphasized that the role of technology was bound to accelerate, with real consequences on the workforce in law firms. "Legal secretaries and the use of professional staff will change quite a bit," he said.

Fitzgerald was more specific. He speculated that significant amounts of work in departments like marketing and accounting will eventually be automated, estimating an eventual 60% reduction in the size of the accounting ranks, for example. And he predicted fewer bodies in all roles in firms' offices.

"Remote working is an unstoppable force. I hate to say that, but we'd better get used to it and deal with it," he said. "Anybody who thinks that the office numbers are going to swell for a protracted period of time—it's difficult to see how that gets done."

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