

# HR Insights

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## Deciding Who Should Continue to Work From Home During the COVID-19 Pandemic

As businesses across the country continue reopening and the threat of a second wave of COVID-19 cases looms, employers are facing difficult decisions regarding work-from-home arrangements.

Some employers are opting to extend work-from-home arrangements until next year, others are asking all employees to return to the office and some are offering a hybrid of the two models.

For employers that are either reopening in phases or allowing some employees to continue to work from home during the pandemic, the question of who should continue working from home becomes a pressing issue. This article will provide an overview of best practices for employers to consider when determining which employees should continue to work from home during the pandemic.

### Review Roles and Responsibilities

While working from home may have been a necessity in the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, it may not have been the ideal format for specific roles. When considering which employees should continue or move to a work-from-home arrangement, it's important to evaluate their specific roles and responsibilities.

For example, if the employee is in a customer-facing role or in a role that requires in-office attendance, working from home may not be feasible. Be sure to evaluate each role objectively and thoroughly to

ensure due diligence, and document reasons supporting the role's necessity for in-office work.

If the employee can fulfill their role's responsibilities regardless of their physical location, they may be a good candidate to work from home or continue working from home.

### Case-by-Case Evaluation

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected each one of your employees in a different way. Some may have health conditions or have a family member with a health condition that puts them at a higher risk for severe COVID-19 illness. Some employees may be juggling child care or other caregiving responsibilities, which require them to work from home. Others may simply not be comfortable returning to the office.

Remember to remain as flexible as possible with employees during these difficult and uncertain times. Consider conducting an organization-wide survey to gauge employees' comfort levels with returning to the office. In addition, consider implementing a formalized process in which employees with individualized concerns about returning to the office or desire to remain working from home can submit a request. These requests should be reviewed objectively and in a timely fashion. In some cases, alternate working schedules, solutions, paid time off or leave may need to be leveraged if working from home is not feasible.



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On the other hand, there may be some employees who would prefer to work from the office. Be sure to hear these requests and respond accordingly. Let employees who wish to return know about any health screening, face-covering requirements and other controls in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at the office.

## **Leave It Up to Departments**

Department heads and managers may have the most insight into how employees are performing remotely. As such, allowing departments to make decisions on who can or can't continue to work from home may be a good option.

As long as productivity isn't impacted and deadlines are being met, it might make sense for employees to work from home. Additionally, if a specific department can do their job remotely and employees feel safer at home, it might make sense to allow entire departments to start or to continue working from home.

## **Be Transparent**

To avoid potential unnecessary animosity among employees, be sure to clearly communicate your process and decisions regarding employees working from home or going back to the office.

When employees feel like you're being transparent and open, it can help them rationalize your decision. Communication and transparency are key during these uncertain times.

For more information or work-from-home resources, contact Toole Insurance today.