

RETURN TO THE WORKPLACE GUIDE & CHECKLISTS

'Returning to the workplace' is unquestionably a process that is likely to look different for companies based on size, industry, geography, demographics and countless unique business factors.

While most are eager to return to normalcy - the ability to rethink, reopen and reoccupy workplaces or operational cadence takes careful thought and consideration, not only to protect your employees but also your business.

Use this guide as a tool in your response-to-recovery process.

The impacts of COVID-19 have been profound and the path to recovery will remain fluid. As always, follow any local, state or national guidance as it relates to safety, guidelines and recommendations. The information included herein is to help guide you, but it does not replace any guidance from the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), [United States Department of Labor](#), [OSHA](#) or local and state laws or guidance.

INCLUDED TOPIC AREAS

1. Decisions to Consider
2. Policy Reviews
3. Legal Considerations
4. Preparing your Workforce
5. Preparing your Workplace
6. Establishing Systems
7. Workplace Changes
8. Customer & Vendor Interactions
9. Planning Ahead





1 | Decisions to Consider

• Early lessons from Asia indicate bringing teams back “full throttle” is unwise. If not all employees are returning to the worksite or are being rehired:

- Decide who needs to be on-site or rehired for business to function normally
 - Devise a plan beyond onsite essential functions for gradual headcount returns where possible
 - Develop a communication plan to explain why these positions are returning and the timeline for others returning or being rehired
- Create an implementation team, a contact person for COVID-19 questions and processes and which teams or people are responsible for communicating new and ongoing safety and security measures
- Decide if and how you will evaluate and monitor employee health as it relates to COVID-19. Considerations include:
- Conducting temperature or employee wellness checks at the start of shifts/each business day to ensure employees do not exhibit Covid-19 symptoms (fever >100.4° F, cough, shortness of breath/ difficulty breathing).
 - Asking employees about their health status before they return to the workplace or from a sick leave (even if they were out with a headache). Will you require certification by a health care professional of ability to safely return to the workplace?
 - Will you require employees to self-report and/or will you be retaining a third party to facilitate any onsite screening efforts? Business risks and liabilities must be considered to this regard.
- Decide if you will contract with an employee assistance program (EAP) if you do not currently have an EAP
- Determine which individual or team will oversee the return-to-work program, procedures, guidelines and accountabilities. It is recommended that this COVID Recovery Task Force include a senior executive, human resources leader, safety officer, risk manager, information technology, operations, real estate and facilities, communications, finance, legal and benefits manager. This group size and variety of positions will vary based on the complexity and size of your organization.
- Appoint a lead or dedicated contact(s) for employee directed COVID-19 questions, communications and outreach – ensure they are aligned with or dually assigned to the COVID Task Force at large to ensure consistent communication across the organization
- Decide and communicate if there are changes in what is provided in common areas, including food, beverages, utensils, glassware, etc.

2 | Policy Reviews

- Review, define and/or and revise return-to-work policies
 - Define employees covered by the return-to-work program
 - Define the reporting process, including frequency and if it is required to provide advance notice to return
 - Medical evaluation documentation and medical provider process
 - How you will assess physical limitations and provide reasonable accommodation
 - Process for limited duty or transitional assignments to safely bring back employees with slight impairments
 - Defined consequences if any employee refuses to participate in the return-to-work program
- Review and revise leave and sick policies
 - If you have not already, determine whether the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) applies to your organization and it affects on your existing policies and practices
 - If needed, incorporate guidance for employees experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or are diagnosed with COVID-19
- Consider whether there is a need for temporarily implementing PTO/vacation rollovers, grace periods and changes to expiring PTO terms
- Update travel policies to adhere to state guidelines, including any additions for quarantine guidelines if traveling for work or personal reasons
- Update any meeting policies
- Review benefits policies for rehire/reinstatement provisions and equally assess eligibility and waiting periods
- Revisit and revise remote work / childcare policies and accommodations
- Revisit and revise guest and visitor policies, including limiting access to certain parts of the buildings, separate entrances and specific meeting rooms or restroom access
- Add or revisit a clean desk policy so unnecessary items are stored in the desk and not on work surfaces to enable new or ongoing deep clean efforts where applicable

3 | Legal Considerations

- Consult your legal and insurance advisors for assistance and options to guide your decision in whether or not to return employees to work following an injury or illness
- Consult your attorney on intended onsite screening practices or protocol to ensure known liabilities are weighed
- Reporting confidentiality
- Avoid discrimination if not all employees are returning to work
- Identifying and accommodating at-risk groups
- Complying with new regulations

4 | Preparing your Workforce

- Communicate proactively when creating plans about returning to work or re-opening facilities
- Provide expected timelines for recalling/rehiring employees
- Provide returning employees with recall or offer letters
- Create a Return-to-Work Kit with any new policies, procedures, forms, how to prepare for arrival and processes and employee must follow
- Understand anxiety and fear in returning, and communicate frequently about cleaning and safety measures that will help protect employees
- Train managers on how to deal with employees managing increased personal challenges around childcare, finances, bereavement and loss and other dependent care
- Establish routine cross-training for any essential duties
- Inform staff who to contact with COVID-19 questions
- Communicate if there are any new requirements to wear PPE and if homemade masks or PPE is allowed to be worn in the workplace

CHECKLIST:

- Ensure all employees have updated policies and procedures
- If applicable, post the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) poster, as applicable, in a visible place, email it to remote workers and post it on intranet or employee websites
- Train and educate the workforce on new safe-at-work requirements and guidelines for all employees
- If employees are returning equipment such as laptops and chairs, instruct if and how they should be sanitized before or upon arrival
- Explain any new entrance protocols for employees and visitors
- Train employees on frequent hand washing, properly covering coughs and sneezes and refraining from touching the face
- Explain company policies and procedures related to illness, cleaning and disinfecting and work meetings and travel
- Explain and share any updates to the return-to-work policy and reporting requirements for future illnesses or injuries
- Train employees on the hazards of the cleaning chemicals used in the workplace in accordance with OSHA's Hazard Communication standard. Updated Safety Data Sheets (SDSs) for most chemicals are readily available on the manufacturer's or supplier's website. Employers should rigorously require that employees carefully review the SDS for any cleaning and disinfecting chemical that they use or come into contact with.
- Share EAP and mental health resources



5 | Preparing your Workplace

- Reference a “Reopening Building and Facility” Checklist if your building or facility was closed or shutdown
- Ensure cleaning products are stocked. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has developed a list of EPA-registered products that have qualified for use against SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19. EPA List N currently (as of 03.19.2020) contains 287 products listed by EPA registration number and common brand name with demonstrated effectiveness against hard to-kill viruses and other human coronaviruses. It is noted that disinfectant products without an EPA registration number have not been evaluated and approved as effective in killing viruses and bacteria.
- Provide appropriate PPE and training on how to properly use and dispose of PPE for those cleaning or re-opening the building
- Determine heavily-used areas that need thorough cleaning, such as event centers, gyms/locker rooms, restrooms and conference rooms
- Provide touch free solutions
- Ensure your workplace cleaning company is using current methods of safety to remove COVID-19 hazards/expand your budget as available for continual deep clean efforts

6 | Establishing Systems

- Establish systems for reporting increased cleaning and reporting illnesses:
- Clean and sanitize surfaces frequently with EPA-registered products
- Create a master schedule for all employees that shows when people may come in contact with others; use this for contact tracing in the event of a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 exposure.
- Create a response plan for employees who report or demonstrate symptoms at work; have recently been at work and tested positive or have been in contact with confirmed COVID-19 case; or have not recently been at work but have tested positive or have been in contact with confirmed case.
- Discourage handshaking, adopt new greeting guidelines



7 | Workplace Changes

- Social distancing in the workplace
 - Change seating layouts so there's at least 6 feet between coworkers
 - Create staggered work hours, if possible, to allow for fewer people in the building at once
 - Remove additional chairs from breakrooms to allow for appropriate distancing
 - Provide visual markers on floors for six-foot distancing, per CDC guidance
- Meetings
 - Consider conducting phone/email/virtual meetings instead of in-person meetings, even when at the office
 - Limit meetings to no more than 10 individuals, provided appropriate spacing if possible
 - Hold meetings in large space where people can spread out at six-foot intervals
- Signs reminding employees and visitors to wash hands:
 - Clean hands often by washing hands with soap and water for 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60% to 95% alcohol may be used. However, if hands are visibly dirty, always wash hands with soap and water.
 - Follow normal preventive actions while at work and home, including cleaning hands and avoiding touching eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.

Additional key times to clean hands include:

- After blowing one's nose, coughing, or sneezing
 - After using the restroom
 - Before eating or preparing food
 - After contact with animals or pets
 - Before and after providing routine care for another person who needs assistance (e.g., a child)
- Signs and/or reminders for employees to clean personal work areas frequently
 - Shared workspaces and conferencing areas should be cleaned prior to using
 - Create office traffic patterns so individuals refrain from cutting through cubicles, common spaces or are passing each other in the halls
 - Consider making the following changes:
 - Adding signs by light switches to keep them 'on' all day
 - Switch to motion activated lights
 - Provide no-touch, wall-mounted hand sanitizer dispenser
 - Remove or keep open non-essential doors
 - Disable or decommission room reservation panels outside meeting rooms
 - Encourage the use of mobile phones and laptops over conference room equipment
 - Remove unnecessary chairs, especially fabric chairs
 - Secure supplies and designate a specific person to manage stock and distribute items
 - For reception areas, increase safety measure, such as the following: add six-foot markers to designate waiting space, remove seating, add protection or change sign-in process so visitors are not in close contact with the receptionist, add hand sanitizer
 - Consider adding antimicrobial surface shields and self-cleaning adhesive surfaces (e.g., Nanoseptic) on high-touch surfaces

8 | Customer & Vendor Interactions

- Offer curbside delivery instead of in-store pick-up.
- Provide on-site services to customer's facility once their business is closed (after hours).
- Offer drive-through service only.
- Add plastic barriers/shields at registers.
- Ask customers to stay in their vehicles in the parking lot while they wait - curbside pick ups
- Add six-foot distance markers at registers or commonly congested areas
- Request health and travel assessments for vendors and contractors coming on-site.
- Separate contractors and vendors from the workforce, such as having them use separate bathrooms and entrances, if possible.
- Prohibit nonessential vendors and deliveries from entering the facility.
- Require deliveries to be dropped outside facility door, eliminating vendors from entering the facility.

9 | Planning Ahead

- Revisit business continuity plans and update with new procedures, lessons learned and improvements.
 - Experts anticipate that COVID-19 will come in waves through the next year, so plan for intermittent remote work or short shutdowns.
- Revisit emergency communication plans, including main contact to communicate plans with employees.
- Consider whether added technology investments may enable broader collaboration or limit future business interruptions.
- Plan regular surveys to understand employee concerns, roadblocks, morale and general sentiment about safety, security, productivity, etc.
- Schedule ongoing training on safety training and updates to keep employees vigilant and performing best practices for office health.
- Provide ongoing training for social engineering and phishing risks, find additional **cyber security** concerns and considerations for remote workers.
- Revisit performance review timelines, rewards and recognition, talent development and learning platforms to continue engaging with employees whether they are remote or onsite.
- Provide ongoing training for managers on how to adapt to hybrid working models, how to monitor productivity and engage with employees who may be struggling, identifying signs of burn-out, encouraging team support, etc.

Resources:

- Centers for Disease Control (CDC)
- World Health Organization (WHO)
- United States Department of Labor
- OSHA
- ThinkHR
- Zywave
- Chamber

Please be advised that any and all information, comments, analysis, and/or recommendations set forth above relative to the possible impact of COVID-19 on potential insurance coverage or other policy implications are intended solely for informational purposes and should not be relied upon as legal or medical advice. As an insurance broker, we have no authority to make coverage decisions as that ability rests solely with the issuing carrier. Therefore, all claims should be submitted to the carrier for evaluation. The positions expressed herein are opinions only and are not to be construed as any form of guarantee or warranty. Finally, given the extremely dynamic and rapidly evolving COVID-19 situation, comments above do not take into account any applicable pending or future legislation introduced with the intent to override, alter or amend current policy language.