



RETURN TO WORK GUIDE FOR EMPLOYER STRATEGIES AND BEST PRACTICES

Plan and implement a safe return to the workplace for your employees during the COVID-19 crisis.

You're answering a lot of questions. But are you asking the right ones?

The majority of employers are struggling to develop a strategy for returning to the workplace — makes sense, this is brand new territory for many leaders.

We've done the legwork and asked a lot of experts, a lot of questions. We've compiled their recommendations and best practices into this plan for you to use as a guide in safely, quickly, and confidently welcoming your people back.

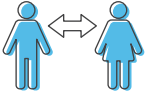
We will continue to update this guide in the coming days and weeks, providing additional resources and tools to support you during this time.



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START HERE

Right now, you're looking for direction and action. Here is what we know works and can immediately be implemented in your workplace.



Physical Distancing

Prioritize maintaining a distance of six feet or more from each other. Since the virus spreads largely from person to person, this is the only truly effective method of slowing the spread of COVID-19.

- Use six-foot space markers and remove excess seating to help employees and customers maintain distance.
- Consider creating unique work shifts or split-team arrangements.
- Display signage and consider posting "persons limit" on entrances and high-traffic, close-quarter areas like elevators, break rooms, and small meeting rooms.
- Prioritize work-from-home when able.
- If you have employees who indicate that they are high risk, be prepared to make reasonable accommodations to keep them safe.



Hand Washing

We all know we should wash our hands often throughout the day, but a quick reminder is always helpful. Regularly encourage employees to practice hygiene recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other government agencies through your communication channels.

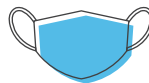
- Post signage at time clocks, in break rooms, and employee restrooms about the importance of proper handwashing procedures.
- Prepare talking points for leaders to use that encourage employees to follow recommended hygiene practices.
- Make sure bathrooms are stocked at all times with soap and paper towels to ensure procedures can be safely followed.



Cleaning

You've likely been cleaning your frequently touched surfaces at home more often than before. Translate those new habits into your workplace. We know the virus can live on surfaces for up to days, so it has never been more important to make sure your office is maintaining a clean work environment to help control the exposure and spread of COVID-19.

- Enhance your daily cleaning practices by instructing your employees to help keep personal and public areas sanitized.
- Keep disinfecting supplies accessible and well-stocked.
- Consider procuring third-party cleaning companies to assist with increased needs.



Masks

The importance of a mask is to help limit the spread of COVID-19 by those who have the virus. Due to the prevalence of asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic spread, we err on the side of caution and recommend you ask all employees to wear a mask.

- The CDC now recommends wearing a cloth face covering (such as a homemade mask or scarf) when you're in public places where it's difficult to maintain social distancing.
- Masks can be made of cotton or similar material. N-95s and surgical masks should be reserved for caregivers in the healthcare setting.
- Masks are not a substitute for physical distancing efforts.

(Check out the next page for a checklist of Action Items that your company can follow.)

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ACTION ITEMS:

- Make sure my workplace is set up to allow for proper social distancing needs (6 feet apart).
 - What needs to be open? Who needs to be there? Can we be creative with staffing? Can we explore remote working?
- Identify the channels I can use to communicate best practices with my employees.
- Share with my leadership the importance of reinforcing the best practices and protocols.
- Evaluate whether our current cleaning measures will be effective in keeping our workplace sanitized and safe.
- Determine what our mask / PPE policy is for our employees.
- Keep legal involved as we establish our guidelines to identify potential roadblocks or concerns.
- Work with HR to develop a plan for employees who fall into a “high-risk” health category.



AWARENESS & PRECAUTION

Screening and monitoring are important protocols to consider as you begin re-establishing your workplace environment.

Here are the questions you should be asking and our answers with recommendations.

Q. Should I test or screen to make sure people are healthy?

A. It is recommended by the CDC and industry experts, such as the American Society of Safety Professionals, that organizations consider screening employees as they return to work. It is important for you, as the employer, to stay informed about what may be required in your geographic location(s).

Q. OK, so if I want to test or screen, what should I do and how often?

A. Start with a General Health Screening – we recommend daily if at all possible.

Step 1: Establish a common entrance area to allow for screenings to be conducted in a safe and private manner.

Step 2: Check temperature and symptoms before allowing employees to enter the facility.

- Use a non-contact infrared thermometer, and assign a dedicated person to complete the temperature checks.
- Use a symptom screening questionnaire that complies with the CDC and EEOC guidelines. (Ask your benefits professional and/or attorney about this – we can also help if you need it!)

Step 3: Track and Monitor

- Develop a way to track those who have done appropriate checks and are “cleared.”
- For employees who are flagged with a temperature of 100° F or greater, or other symptoms, work with Human Resources to determine your protocol for next steps.

Q: Should I be testing for COVID-19? What about antibodies?

A. As of the date of this guide, there are over 90 COVID-19 tests and the validity and accuracy are rapidly changing. Antibody testing, performed on blood samples, can tell us who had the virus, but there still isn't enough evidence to know what immunity to this virus looks like. Antibody tests are not an effective way to diagnose current infection. It is not the direct “yes” or “no” you wanted, but the good news is we will keep you updated with the latest from the CDC.

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If you decide you'd like to test employees for COVID-19, we recommend working with your benefits manager and attorney to talk through the following question set:

- What are our protocols for determining which employees need to be tested?
- How frequently or what events would trigger testing?
- What type of testing should we use?
- What types of ID documentation will employees need to provide?
- What legal disclosures and documentation need to be developed?
- What are the costs associated with testing?

Q. What if someone tests positive for COVID-19?

A. Act quickly (but calmly) to minimize the risk of spreading. You will likely be met with many questions and concerns – some you can answer, and some you should defer. If you are asked about health or risk-related questions, defer your employee to his or her physician or the CDC website. Your role is to reinforce that you and your company are here to support them.

HR protocols will need to be determined so you can effectively (and legally) take action:

- How will we ask the employee to report the other employees he or she has been in close contact with over the last 14 days?
- What is our protocol to contact those who have had exposure to the positive employee? What does that messaging look like to maintain confidentiality?

Q. What does legal / regulatory need to be thinking about?

A. Your attorney and benefits manager will be able to help you think through your protection and liability. Below are a few starter questions we've found helpful:

- Health Privacy: Do we need a broad Safe Harbor?
- Discrimination Claims: What measures are in place to avoid?
- Exposure Liability: Are we protected if an employee is exposed at the workplace?
- What additional legal liabilities are you concerned about?

ACTION ITEMS:

- Stay up to date on local recommendations for screening protocols.
- Set up a general screening area with proper screening equipment, questionnaire and a dedicated staff member to complete the check-ins.
- Meet with benefits manager and legal to explore COVID-19 testing and outlined questions.
- Establish a strategy for positive COVID-19 testing and return-to-work strategies.
- Set up time with an attorney to review outstanding legal/regulatory questions.

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360° SUPPORT

Your team will be looking to you as they are asked to embrace new changes and the many emotions associated with navigating their “new normal.” Mental, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual concerns should be considered as you develop your organization’s plan.

It’s critical to acknowledge that each employee and his or her family have been impacted differently based on their own unique circumstances. Below are common topics you need to be mindful of:



Family Childcare and Caretaking Dynamics

Survey your employees about who in their home depends on them and consider these scenarios:

- Are there childcare or caretaker options available for employees?
- If not, what is their plan?
- How can you support your employees with this challenge?



Personal Finance

Between layoffs, furloughs, volatile stock markets, and variable expenses, personal finance is top of mind for many employees.

- Remind employees about financial wellness programs, resources, and/or webinars that are available.
- Reach out to your financial wellness program about additional steps you can take to support your employees.
- **If you do not have financial wellness resources available**, consider working with your benefits provider to establish a point of contact.



Mental Health Impact

Many employees are suffering from anxieties and fears associated with the rippling impacts of COVID-19. It is critical that you keep your mental health benefits top of mind for your employees during this time.

- Remind employees about mental health benefits available with clear direction on how to access the resources.
- Leaders should spearhead the importance of mental health and break the stigma by sharing personal success stories related to their own use of the services.
- Ensure that access to the available benefits is simple and ready for utilization.
- **If you do not have mental health resources available**, develop a plan to give employees a point of contact when support is needed.



Healthcare Access

We often forget that even during a crisis, normal aches, pains, and illnesses can (and do!) happen. Employees and families still need to practice good health habits, including preventive care and condition management (like diabetes care).

- Remind your employees about your telemedicine offering with clear instructions on how to access for themselves and those on their health plan.
- Consider resources that keep employees out of health clinics, such as on-site visits for flu clinics or screenings.
- Consider implementing and promoting virtual health options like online checkups and access to condition management health experts.

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SOURCES:

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