

return to the workplace

planning guide for employers



About this planning guide

This planning guide walks you through questions to help your business leaders, HR, Finance, and response teams organize your employees’ return to the workplace when COVID-19 circumstances allow for it.

Our strategic approach to Return to the Workplace is centered on three areas: Workplace and Worker Readiness, Workforce Support, and Enterprise Resilience.

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Guiding principles

In this rapidly changing situation, agree with your leadership team on 3-5 guiding principles you will use to clarify and simplify decision-making.

Examples:

- Employee health and safety always come first.
- Our customers rely on us to...
- We will make decisions together across businesses and adopt consistent approaches.
- We will strive to balance employee needs with business needs.

What are your 3-5 guiding principles?

Decision criteria

The decision to bring employees back to the workplace will depend on a variety of factors which will vary by location and may shift over time. These criteria should be fact-based and, therefore, differ from the guiding principles above which would be a judgment balance between the economics of the business and empathy for your people.

Examples of decision criteria include:

- Government mandates and guidance
- Community outbreak conditions
- Availability of transportation
- Personal considerations (e.g. school openings, child care)
- Office conditions

What are the decision criteria you will use to inform your decisions about returning?

Worker and manager responsibilities

We all have responsibilities to maintain our employees' health and well-being. This section lays out worker and manager responsibilities and can be used by your leadership teams to develop communications strategies and plans.

Worker responsibilities

- What should an employee do who isn't feeling well or who has been in contact with someone who isn't feeling well?
- What are your expectations of social distancing and personal safety practices?
- What should employees expect if conditions change quickly?

What responsibilities do you expect of your employees at work and remotely?

Manager responsibilities

- What is the role of your managers when someone displays symptoms or isn't feeling well?
- With whom should your managers coordinate when faced with an unwell employee?
- What are your manager policies with regards to ensuring social distancing and other work patterns to ensure employee safety?

What responsibilities do you expect of your managers at work and remotely?

Return to the workplace

Workplace and worker readiness

Health, safety, economics and empathy should all be in play when preparing to return to reopen the workplace. Build a plan that is flexible and allows for the different needs of your people appropriately balanced with productivity expectations and the economic needs of your business.

Workplace readiness

Preparing the physical environment before employees return to the workplace is essential to preventing any possibility of COVID-19 contamination. Consider policies and procedures for:

- Facility opening validation and redesign
- Sanitizing and cleansing
- Clinical guidelines for screening, protective equipment, social distancing, and testing
- Common areas
- Other tenants, visitors, vendors and non-employee considerations

What criteria will you use to assess readiness to return?

Worker readiness

Each employee will be in a different situation that affects their ability to return to the workplace, whether their health, responsibilities at home, transportation or general discomfort and anxiety. Be flexible when employees would like to continue remote work; they know their personal circumstances better than you do. Determine different scenarios and your recommended approach:

Examples:

- Physical readiness: health risk for self or household member
- Emotional readiness such as general anxiety
- Clinical guidelines for personal protective equipment, social distancing, and more
- Caring for family members
- Communication and engagement strategies

How will you assess which employees should return when, their readiness to return, and actions to prepare them?

Workforce support

We will all be returning to a new way of working and supporting each other whether physically, emotionally, professionally or personally. It is important to reassess your talent strategy, working patterns, benefits and rewards systems to make sure the appropriate level of support is being given to promote productivity, motivation and security in this new world.

Examples of workforce support considerations:

- Compensation and rewards adjustments for onsite workers
- Expanded benefits (e.g. caregiving support, virtual care, behavioral health)
- Leave and PTO policies
- Remote working policies
- New working patterns to ensure safety (e.g. split teams, split hours, all employees in)
- Travel guidelines

What adjustments do you need to make for the well-being of your firm and your people as they return to the workplace?

Working patterns

There are several models to transition back to working in the office—but remember that circumstances may change and waves of community infection may reoccur. Be flexible with virtual work arrangements at least through the end of 2020.

Enterprise Resilience

It is very important to ensure safety at all times to mitigate the risk of new cases of COVID-19 within the workforce or resurgence of the outbreak. On-going monitoring and intervention procedures are critical to ensuring enterprise resilience.

Examples:

- Consistent criteria for determining if safety is maintained
- On-going employee health monitoring (e.g. temperature checks)
- Organizational response to a resurgence
- Communication strategy for monitoring and intervention
- Employee engagement and perception monitoring

What is your monitoring and intervention plan? How will you mitigate potential risks to ensure enterprise resilience?

Employers need to address COVID-19 impacts by balancing empathy in meeting their people's needs with the economics of the business. With our collective expertise in health & wellbeing, workforce strategies and risk management, Mercer and Marsh can help you plan your return with confidence. Our Return to the Workplace virtual workshop allows our team of experienced consultants to collaborate with your cross-functional team to prepare a customized plan. We can also assist with your preparedness in specific areas you need immediate support.

Learn more at the [Mercer US New Shape of Work Hub](#) and request a consultation, or [contact your Mercer Consultant](#).

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