

# return to the workplace

quick reference guide



The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we work, and these changes are permeating far beyond the peak of the contagion. As we navigate these uncharted waters, we find ourselves dealing simultaneously with a health and economic crisis.

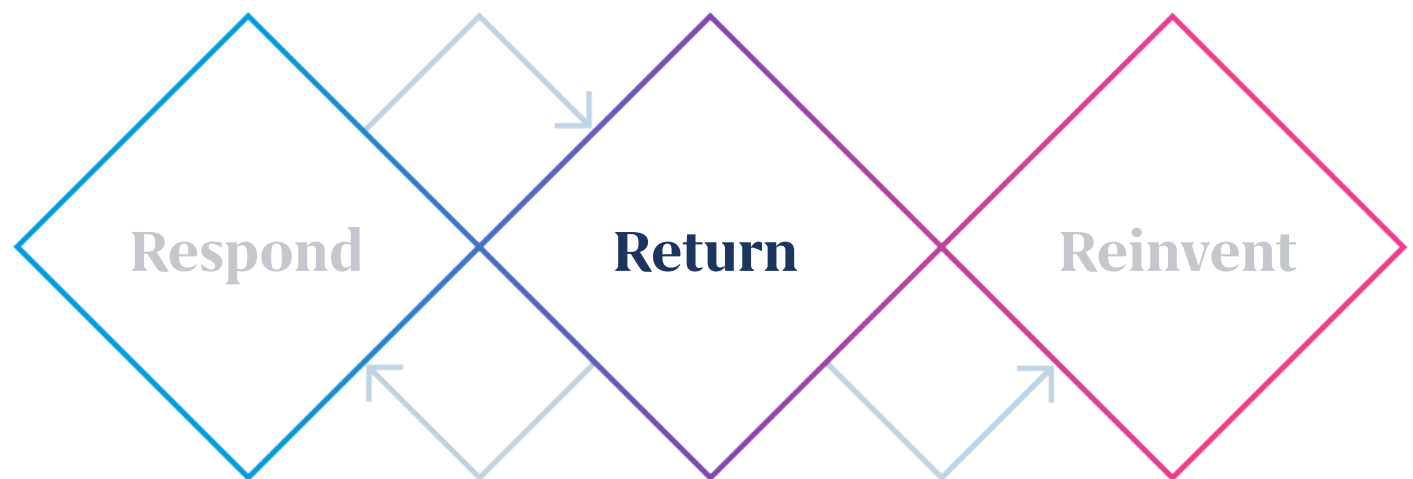
As states begin to relax stay-at-home mandates, employers are faced with returning their workforces to the workplace. Although many are eager to get back to normal, there's wide acknowledgement that "normal" will look different.

There are both human and business risks associated with returning to the workplace. To help you identify and solve for these issues, Mercer and Marsh have leveraged our collective expertise in workforce strategies, health & wellbeing and risk management to create a framework for returning to the workplace with confidence.

## Navigating the pandemic response lifecycle

Employers will move through three distinct phases as they navigate the pandemic: Respond, Return and Reinvent. Employers will alternate between the phases depending on the course of the pandemic, government responses, and the resilience of their industry and business.

- Respond: Immediate actions employers are taking. Reactive, focused on ensuring business continuity.
- Return: As the spread of the virus slows, people and businesses will return to a "new" normal.
- Reinvent: Disruption brings opportunity to reflect, reset and reinvigorate. In rising to meet the demands of a changed world, businesses will need to reinvent themselves while holding true to their purpose.



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

## Use this checklist to begin.

### Workplace and worker readiness

Preparing the workplace and identifying and preparing employees to return to the workplace.

#### Workplace

- Workplace opening validation: Establish cross-functional teams (security, safety, HR, legal etc.) to validate worksite for opening.
- Functional redesign: Protect workers, customers and other visitors by constructing an environment that allows for social distancing.
- Cleaning: Establish processes for frequent, consistent and diligent cleaning. Consider processes for cleaning upon positive confirmed exposure (e.g. contract with trained personnel to perform deep cleaning).

#### Worker

- Identification: Determine if workplace return will happen in waves – by location, function, risk stratification, etc.
- Screening and attestation: Most practical route is self-attestation. Such screenings are considered medical information, therefore maintaining privacy is necessary, which should apply across temperature, COVID-19 or antibody screenings.
- Personal Protective Equipment: May help limit spread in the workplace, especially where employees may have a difficult time maintaining social distancing.
- Communications: Clearly communicate workplace rules and policies for exposure and quarantine upfront, and establish a regular cadence for ongoing communications.

### Workforce support

Strategies to support employees as they return to the workplace and strategies to support remote workers.

- Compensation and rewards: Determine if new incentives are warranted by market conditions.
- Talent management: Review people structure to ensure it still meets the need of business and prepare succession planning for future pandemics.
- Health and welfare benefits: Evaluate healthcare coverage, leave / PTO policies.
- Digital health strategy: Build out digital offerings to ensure continued virtual access to those who are unable to, or prefer not to, receive physical care.
- Behavioral health: Ensure suite of offerings provides support in the post-pandemic world, including social/ worksite anxiety, PTSD or “survivor syndrome”.
- Family support: Establish child care, elder care and caregiving support for those who need to return to work, but are responsible for children out of school, sick relatives, etc.
- Remote-first strategies: Create a thriving remote-first environment for those employees who will not immediately return to a physical work environment.
- Communications: Clearly communicate available support upfront and establish a regular cadence for ongoing communications.
- Travel: Determine best approach to phase in return to business travel and global mobility.

### Enterprise resilience

Preparation and planning for mitigation of future outbreaks and potential impacts.

- Policies overhaul: Establish plans for exposure/ quarantine, crisis management and situational monitoring for future pandemics, or resurgence of COVID-19.
- Pandemic preparation: Revise and refine business disruption plan. Establish c-suite and board pandemic advisory, and deploy analytic services for decision-making.
- Population health: Analyze employee demographics and clinical trends to establish guidelines on when stricter response measures are necessary.
- Listen: Consider pulse surveys and other tools to conduct focus groups and gather feedback on the employee “return to the workplace” experience.
- Communications: Clarify plans for continued monitoring and intervention, as well as preparation for future pandemics, to employees.

## Learn more

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 experience in health & wellbeing, workforce strategies and risk management, Mercer and Marsh can help your team with a cross-functional virtual workshop or assist you in specific areas to prepare for a confident return.

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