



# SAFER

## Recommended Actions for “Future-Proofing” Your Workplace

Nearly three years into the pandemic, COVID-19 mitigation policies are being relaxed or lifted completely. The conversation around the pandemic is shifting from vaccines, case rates and crisis management to how to be successful in this “new normal.” Employers know the pandemic changed how we work, live and go about our day, and organizations are continually forced to adapt as the normal we know now is very different than it was before COVID-19 came along.

As we continue to navigate this phase of the pandemic, the *SAFER* team at the National Safety Council has provided recommendations for employers to continue to ensure safety in their workplaces and “future-proof” their operations against new developments in the pandemic and beyond.

### Recommendations to “future-proof” your workplace

#### 1. Continue to encourage risk-based approaches and vaccination uptake

- a. Vaccination
  - i. NSC recommends employers require vaccinations for employees as it’s the safest, most effective way to protect your workforce.
  - ii. Offer paid time off for vaccination and recovery as well as paid time off for parents to get their kids vaccinated.
  - iii. Remove barriers to getting vaccinated such as offering an on-site vaccination clinic, assisting with transportation costs, helping workers find a clinic that offers services in their primary language, etc.

- b. Masking
  - i. Continue to implement mask mandates, especially when in a community of high case and death rates.
  - ii. Cloth and surgical face masks are less effective than they once were as the virus causing COVID-19 has mutated and become more transmissible. Provide and encourage the use of PPE respirators (e.g., N-95 masks) or KN-95 face masks in situations where workers are using masks.
  - iii. Encourage masking for business travel and when employees are in close proximity with each other (especially indoors).
- c. Enhanced [ventilation and air filtration](#)
  - i. CDC recommends a layered approach to reduce COVID-19 exposures. Businesses should consider including improvements to building ventilation to reduce the spread of disease and lower the risk of exposure.
- d. Social distancing
  - i. Encourage social distancing for employees who come into contact with each other, especially when in close proximity or when conducting business travel.
- e. Contact tracing
  - i. Continue to implement [contact tracing](#) at worksites and communicate cases with your local public health official.

## 2. Create a culture of psychological safety

- a. Encourage workers to speak up without fear of repercussions and create policies supporting a worker's ability to disclose incidents
- b. Embrace [positive conflict](#)
  - i. Not all conflict is bad. Conflict can be constructive and lead to positive outcomes if leaders approach it with a positive attitude.

## 3. Promote Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I)

- a. Consider creating committees (comprised of workers of all levels) to address DE&I at your workplace
- b. Include all aspects of DE&I – do not only focus solely on diversity, but also on creating a culture of equity and inclusion
  - i. Identify systemic and institutionalized racism, bias, disparity, inequality and inequity in practices, policies, procedures and programming.
  - ii. Analyze data and information for racism, bias and inequity related to impairment, safety and wellbeing.

## 4. View your workers as “whole” people

- a. Provide continuous support for employees working through mental health, substance use and misuse, and other impairment issues

- i. Offer Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) to workers and help them navigate the programs to ensure they get the assistance they need.
- ii. Give employees access to paid time off to get help and address impairment issues that may be present in their lives.
- iii. Consider creating [Recovery-Friendly Workplaces](#) (RFW) that promote individual wellness by supporting people recovering from substance use disorders.
- iv. Survey workers to uncover where support may be needed.
  - 1. Identify needs and wants when it comes to EAPs, wellness programs and other supportive measures.
  - 2. Evaluate the effectiveness of policies implemented to bolster worker wellbeing.
  - 3. Make sure to address diversity and inclusion by implementing [worker surveys](#). The surveys will bring more clarity on those subjects and allow employers to make positive changes to their organization.
- b. Address stress, fatigue and burnout with workers
  - i. Check in with your workers.
    - 1. NSC recommends building checklists or reminders into daily procedures encouraging workers to assess whether they are physically and mentally in good shape to perform safely and productively at work. For example, a self-assessment to bring awareness to potential impairment issues (e.g., “Did I get a good night’s sleep and do I feel rested and alert?”). Make sure to check in with your workers on a consistent basis.
    - 2. Ask questions at the beginning of shifts (e.g., “How is your family doing,” “How are you feeling, mentally, today?”, “Is there anything I can do to support you today?” etc.).
  - ii. Create a safe space for workers to disclose issues affecting their fitness for duty and ability to perform safely at work. Don’t punish or stigmatize workers who recognize and proactively address impairment issues.
  - iii. Supervisors should model a culture of openness and willingness to discuss impairment-related issues.

## **5. Continue to evolve your emergency preparedness plan**

- a. Develop a plan and review it with workers more than once (e.g., quarterly, annually or as changes are made)
- b. Be flexible – as the world changes, make sure your plan is able to adapt to various scenarios that could harm your workforce or business operations
- c. Work with public health professionals to develop or update emergency preparedness plans, especially as it relates to infectious diseases
- d. Be inclusive – get input from leadership, HR, workers, etc. when developing your plan

## 6. Learn to adapt to changing work

- a. Hybrid work
  - i. Offer hybrid work options or fully remote options for workers when feasible.
  - ii. Ensure worker safety when working from home by conducting ergonomic assessments, ensuring workers are aware of EAP offerings, workplace safety checks, etc.
- b. Technology
  - i. Adapt to changing technology by staying up to date with means of communication and workflow.