

SAFER

Safe Actions For Employee Returns



Employment, Legal & Human Resources Considerations Return-to-Work Guidance

Preparing the workforce to transition back to the workplace

A major consideration beyond the protocols to address the physical, medical, emotional and mental issues of reopening the workplace is the cumulative level of change that employees have experienced over weeks and months. Workers will undoubtedly have many questions and/or anxieties about transitioning back to a physical work environment, in terms of both their safety and health as well as disruption to what has become the “new normal” of sheltering in place and/or working from home. Employers need to proactively identify potential problems and solutions. Cross-functional partnership at the leadership level will help ensure the workforce is physically and psychologically prepared to return.

What is covered in this document:

Policies and Procedures
Management of Change



SAFER

Safe Actions For Employee Returns

Policies and Procedures

Because of the pandemic, organizations likely allowed for flexibility in some work policies, which may require further adjustment upon return to a physical workspace. Actions surrounding these types of policies and procedures include the following:

- Confirm work status (e.g. active, working extended hours, working from home, on leave or furlough, change in hours, change in pay)
- Determine essential roles and protocols around a phased re-introduction of workers
- Review employment actions based on business need (e.g., furlough/layoff, hour/pay change)
- Review workers' compensation procedures as related to COVID-19
- Assess employee travel policies, including who is eligible/required to travel, and ways to track if employees are visiting a region/city where there are outbreaks or risks of exposure
- Consider the implementation of reporting policies and mandatory 14-day quarantine for employees who travel for personal reasons (e.g. vacation) to high risk regions/countries
- Review work from home policies and provide instructions and tools for ergonomic home office setups
- Assess leave of absence and PTO policies
- Review infection detection and reporting procedures and methods for tracking
- Develop a plan to reintegrate employees who have recovered from COVID-19
- Navigate the concerns for higher risk populations and consider how to incorporate high-risk employee profiles (e.g. over 60 years old, known medical conditions that are at higher risk) following EEOC guidance on protected classes
- Recommend or require employees to wear personal face coverings at work (check with applicable local and state requirements)
- Review reasonable accommodation program guidelines

Management of Change

Most employees will likely expect there to be changes in policies, protocols, and even the physical workspace following the pandemic shutdown. The following actions may be considered to reduce anxiety about returning to work and ensure that employees know what to expect, and may still be relevant to essential workplaces that did not fully shut down during the pandemic:

- Maintain timely and frequent communication with employees about policy and design changes
- Cross-train workers to perform essential functions so the workplace can operate even if key workers are absent
- Solicit open feedback on challenges and take action, as appropriate, while communicating back to employees the rationale as to why or why not action was taken

SAFER

Safe Actions For Employee Returns

- Convey in detail why certain protocol and design changes were adopted
- Provide virtual work support to encourage continued virtual collaboration
- Engage in virtual training to introduce employees to new protocols and patterns of behavior before they return to a physical workplace and ensure a method for acknowledgment that the training has been completed prior to returning to the workplace
- Inform and train employees in any new organizational roles and responsibilities that have been instituted as precautionary measures against reinfection
- Develop cross-training plans for potential fluctuation in the workforce (e.g., employees out for quarantine periods or due to leaves of absence) to ensure business continuity, and communicate appropriately to help employees understand their revised job responsibilities
- Develop a process to effectively track employees who may be out for an extended period, and their tentative return dates for continuity purposes
- Develop plans for crucial leadership continuity should leaders be impacted and out of office due to COVID-19.
- Create (or maintain) a web page for employees dedicated to COVID-19 (e.g., internal memos, pay codes, EAP/HR links, etc.) and keep it updated