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Safe Actions For Employee Returns



Communication Considerations Return-to-Work Guidance

Ensuring effective and timely communication to facilitate return to work

Effective, timely and frequent communication is necessary to create the shared sense of safety and security among a workforce and ease the process of returning to work. In addition to including the details of the transition, a communications plan should anticipate employee concerns and questions. The right communication tactics can exhibit enhanced caring from leadership and help employees practice better awareness of their surroundings for physical distancing and more. Below are several factors for organizations to consider when developing a comprehensive COVID-19 change management communications strategy.

What is covered in this document:

General Communication Considerations
Personnel and Policy Changes
Instructions for Arrival



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General Communication Considerations

- Identify the role of leadership in communication engagement and consider how messaging should be approved and delivered to employees
- Establish or update feedback mechanisms for responding to return to work communications so that employee concerns are appropriately and quickly addressed
- Create company approved talking points that supervisors can use; develop set of FAQ so that supervisors and managers are consistent in messaging
- Leverage multiple communication channels to reach the audience including phone, app-based, video (e.g., Skype, Zoom), verbal, digital displays, speaker systems, flyers, posters, email and postal mail

Personnel and Policy Changes

Because of the pandemic, organizations likely allowed for flexibility in many work policies, all of which will have to be reassessed and potentially revised and reissued upon return to a physical workspace. To guard against subsequent waves of the virus, and to be better prepared for similar events, organizations will likely create new roles and responsibilities for individuals. The following are some recommended actions for communicating this information:

- Describe why certain groups (e.g., departments, divisions, locations) or individuals were chosen to return to the workplace, if using a phased approach
- Define “vulnerable populations,” both for employees and family members of employees
- Explain the rationale behind the creation of new roles/positions within the organization for dealing with the impact of the coronavirus
- Outline the new responsibilities and emphasize existing responsibilities for existing roles/positions to ensure health and safety in the wake of the pandemic and how employees are expected to engage with the individuals who have assumed new roles
- Convey in detail why certain protocol and design changes were adopted (i.e., in response to risk assessment of new operations procedures)
- Explain the benefits of returning to a shared work environment (e.g., increased productivity and innovation, access to shared equipment and network, improved customer service, etc.)
- Clearly describe when and how and why organizational policies differ from public policies (e.g., region specific)
- Communicate to employees what remains the same in the organization (e.g., core values) and work to link messaging to established vision and mission statements

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Instructions for Arrival

In order for employees to return to a workplace, many organizations may institute screening (through self-assessments, symptom checks and temperature checks) to clear employees for entry into a building or site, in addition to other new entrance policies. Communication should be explicit and clear so employees know what to expect when arriving back on site.

- Outline new entrance protocols for employees and visitors, including how, when and where screenings will take place (may need to be mailed to employees that do not have email addresses)
- Communicate to employers how medical privacy is maintained for any screening processes including communicating the process for employees who do not pass screening criteria and addressing possible stigma associated with not passing a screening protocol
- Consider using simple, branded, visual signage as a straightforward approach to remind people to reduce their risk and/or let visitors know what your organization is doing to help ensure the safety of employees and visitors
- Conduct demonstrations or training to introduce new behaviors to employees in anticipation of arrival back on site
- Provide and regularly remind employees of instructions for bringing work equipment back into the facility and sanitizing items
- Alert employees to changes in the work environment (e.g., availability of meeting rooms, occupancy restrictions, relocation of work stations, breakroom guidelines, etc. to allow for physical distancing)
- Describe how the facility or site was prepared and will be maintained for arrival of employees (e.g., cleaning and disinfecting)
- Tailor communication strategy for public-facing employees and determine the best way to communicate new policies with them