

Moving  
Forward  
Together  
→



Return to  
Workplace Guide:  
**Considerations  
for Employee  
Reentry**



The coronavirus pandemic has significantly altered the work environment. Companies of all types, from technology to nonprofits to healthcare and hospitality are examining their business strategies and contemplating how to transition employees into the new work environment.

Leading with our company values of committed and in this together, our top priority has been to support our clients, colleagues, and communities. In early March 2020, we launched the [ABD COVID-19 Communications portal](#), which contains leadership, business and compliance insights and resources to help you navigate COVID-19 related challenges. Continuing in that spirit, we created this guide, along with a series of corresponding deep dive webinars, to offer considerations on how to safely and strategically create your roadmap to resuming operations.

This guide is not intended to be one size fits all, but rather a framework you can use when developing a plan specific to your company, culture, locations, customer-base and employee needs. We understand each company will move forward on a unique path and will return to the workplace only when the time is right.

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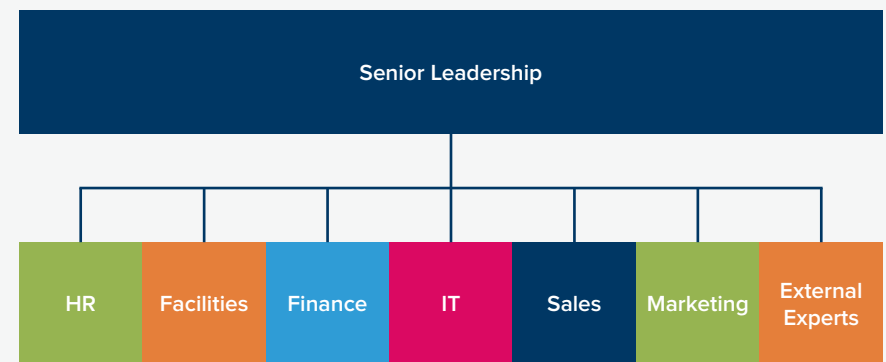
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## Before Creating Your Reentry Plan

As local and state governments begin to lift shelter in place orders, companies are thinking deeply and broadly about what is required in the new work environment. Successful reentry plans will connect to company culture and values and be perceived as a collaborative effort that was transparent, flexible, and keenly focused on employee concerns and safety.

## Recommendations

Develop a multi-disciplinary team to craft and roll out the plan, include key internal stakeholders and external experts such as attorneys, architects, CPAs, safety specialists and space planners who can add valuable knowledge. Be sure to identify who will own portions of plan before, during and after roll-out.



Review guidance from federal, state and local authorities regarding reopening requirements and shelter in place directives. Guiding authorities may include the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), [Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\)](#), Office of the Governor, in addition to state and local departments of Public Health (refer to the Resource Section for additional sources). It is important to note several states and counties are establishing specific requirements by business type. Tap into industry associations (i.e. restaurant, spa, transportation, tourism) for more specific and tailored guidelines.



Consider all company locations and determine if the organizational plan will focus on a local, regional or national rollout - a single nation-wide plan may be easier to implement. As part of that, identify your company's risk tolerance for returning to the workplace: conservative, moderate or aggressive approach. Remember risk can include financial, health, legal, reputation and safety.

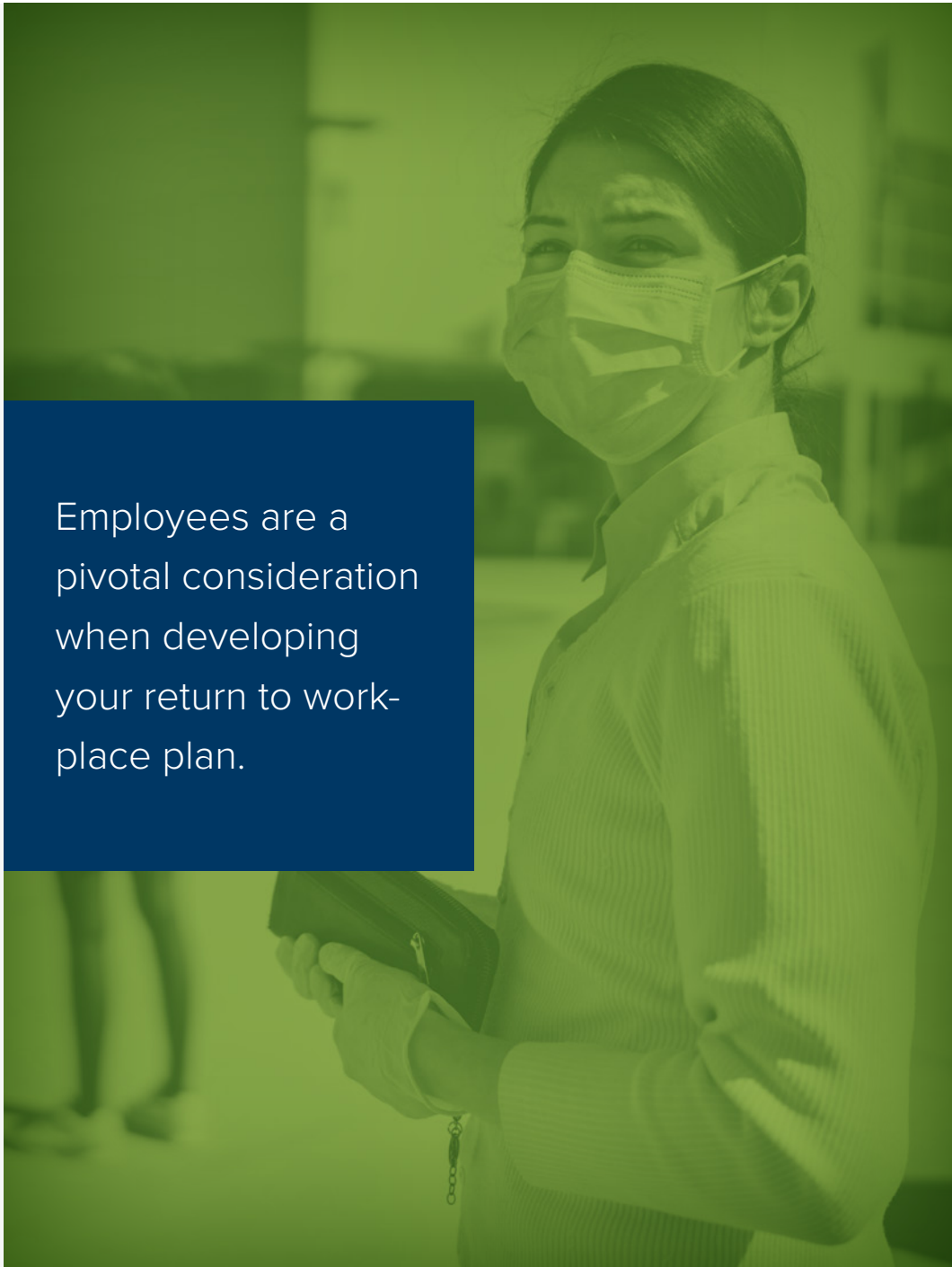
Conduct a risk assessment to identify where and how employees and visitors may be exposed. Many companies find it helpful to perform scenario planning and physical walk-throughs of the work environment to identify high risk situations and locations. A broad assessment also includes:

- short and long-term scenarios, if sheltering is (again) required in future months/years
- an analysis of staff roles and duties to determine levels of risk and required precautions – see [OSHA occupational risk pyramid](#)
- a review of shared property, entry/exit points and elevators particularly for multi-tenant buildings where others are also returning to the workplace

Businesses will also need to develop a communication strategy with a timeline and name a spokesperson.

Surveying employees about their feelings, thoughts, and concerns regarding being in the workplace will provide critical information, shaping when and how they return. The Council of Insurance Agents and Brokers offers a [sample survey](#).

Lastly, be prepared for the plan to be iterative, particularly as new information from trusted sources is released and you learn from experience and employee feedback.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a white face mask and a light-colored button-down shirt, is shown from the chest up. She is holding a dark folder or book in her left hand and looking slightly to her right. The background is a blurred office hallway. The entire image has a green tint, and a dark blue rectangular box is overlaid on the right side, containing white text.

Employees are a pivotal consideration when developing your return to workplace plan.

## Establish The New Work Environment

Before day one of reentry, ensure the physical workplace is prepared and ready for employee occupancy. It is helpful to develop and deploy a readiness assessment for each work site. The assessment should include building systems such as mechanical, HVAC and water lines, particularly if the building was unoccupied for an extended length of time. Where possible, conduct a physical walk-through of the location. After completing building checks, companies should begin to space plan with focus on physical distancing and occupancy levels.

### Recommendations

Inspect building equipment & ensure operational

Open windows & turn on air to ventilate

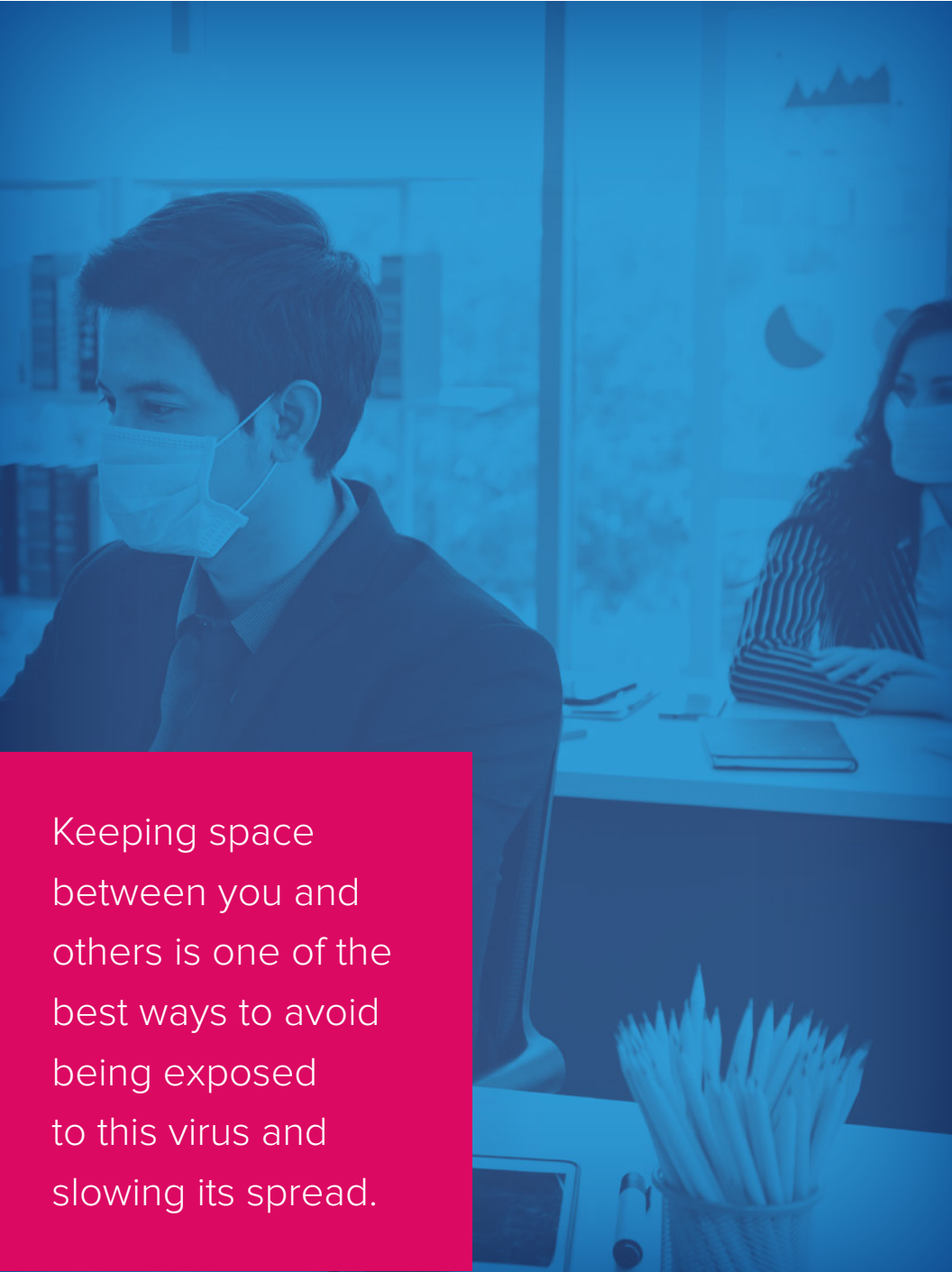
Replace air filters throughout

Review & revise the workspace layout

Determine maximum number of staff possible

To limit contact and comply with 6-foot social distancing requirements consider the following options.

- Move lobby furniture and equipment
- Devise one-way traffic patterns
- Mark pathways on the floor and add signage to walls to clearly identify direction
- Prohibit sharing desks or hoteling
- Assign desks and equipment to staff
- Separate desks or add partitions
- Use hanging acrylic or plastic dividers for high-traffic customer facing areas
- Limit number of staff in conference rooms and mark seating areas with tape
- Post occupancy allowed for each room and remove excess chairs
- Limit number of staff in break rooms, kitchens and other communal areas via closing the space or removing seating
- Remove or secure high touch appliances such as refrigerators, dishwashers, microwaves and water and coffee dispensers
- Install touchless faucets, soap and paper towel dispensers and trash cans
- Place paper products and trash cans next to doors requiring use of handles
- Assign a designated space for mail and deliveries



Keeping space between you and others is one of the best ways to avoid being exposed to this virus and slowing its spread.



## Focus On Employee Health & Safety

The most important component of any work environment is its people. Businesses can make a positive impact on employee health and safety by adopting health and safety policies, providing personal protective equipment (PPE) and performing routine cleaning and disinfecting. The CDC recommends using EPA registered disinfectants. To achieve a clean workplace, facility managers and janitorial services should understand the difference between cleaning and disinfecting as steps to maintaining the workplace.

### Recommendations



#### ENGAGE

- Appoint and train a safety coordinator to monitor protocols and compliance
- Significantly limit or ban visitors, customers, and vendors
- Limit in-person meetings to those absolutely necessary
- Require employees to primarily use virtual or telephone meetings
- Prohibit potlucks and sharing of food, including open food packages
- Establish protocols for use of company vehicles by staff (i.e. single occupants only, daily cleaning)



#### PLAN

- Post handwashing signage throughout the workspace and educate employees on handwashing and cough/sneeze etiquette
- Install hand sanitizer stations at entry/exits and throughout the property
- Ensure multiple locations are available for handwashing, with soap and running water
- Instruct employees to cover their mouth and nose with their sleeve or a tissue when coughing or sneezing
- Place tissue products throughout the workspace for ease of use
- Perform routine checks on supplies to ensure dispensers are full and functioning



## PREPARE

- Determine the quantity of gloves or other personal protective equipment (PPE) needed
- Place initial order for supplies and consider a recurring or automatic purchase cycle
- Establish a method for distributing PPE and how employees will request more
- Require face coverings in accordance with local and state ordinances - refer to guidance from [CDC](#) and [OSHA](#)
- Establish when facial coverings are required (i.e. walking around the workspace, bathrooms, entry and exit of building)
- Designate specific trash cans for PPE



## COMPLETE

- Identify areas for deep cleaning and routine disinfecting
- Single out highly trafficked and touched areas, such as elevators, stairs, lobby, supply rooms, chairs and tables
- Set building open and close times to allow for cleaning without staff present
- Establish daily cleaning and disinfecting procedures with facilities and janitorial staff
- Ensure frequent disinfecting of high-contact objects and surfaces such as elevator buttons, light switches, doorknobs, railings, copiers, keyboards, equipment, vending machines and timeclocks
- Devise a method to track and audit when cleaning is performed



## CONTINUE

- Review the [EPA](#) listing of products known to eliminate Coronavirus
- Obtain cleaning and disinfecting supplies, hand soap, hand sanitizer, and paper products
- Follow product use instructions to ensure effectiveness
- Ensure secondary containers with cleaning fluids have appropriate labeling, following [OSHA](#) requirements
- Store products in a central location following manufacturer instructions
- Create a daily cleaning checklist for employees
- Issue personal cleaning supplies to staff and require ask they clean high touch areas before and after use
- Provide disposable gloves for employees to use while cleaning
- Place cleaning supplies in communal areas (i.e. conference rooms, copy area)

To achieve a clean workplace, facility managers and janitorial services should understand the difference between cleaning and disinfecting, as steps to protecting the workplace.



# Prepare For Employee Reentry

For many companies ensuring a smooth employee transition back to the workplace is top of mind. A pivotal element of that is understanding the needs and concerns of employees. Utilize the results from employee survey(s) about returning to inform your choices about when and how to phase employees back in. If utilizing a hybrid approach of remote and on premise work, develop criteria based on roles and business need to support decisions.

## Recommendations

### Reentry

- Review availability of public transportation and childcare for employees; this may significantly impact their ability to return
- Identify alternatives to public transportation for employees to get to work
- Determine which roles may remain remote and which are essential to be in the workplace
- Limit employee travel to essential only
- Determine who will return first (i.e. volunteers, essential only, client-facing)
- Develop a small pilot group to test new workplace practices
- Give employees ample notice (2-4 weeks) so they can prepare
- Consider a 15-30-day trial period to learn from the pilot group
- Set-up a process for routine communication with and feedback from the pilot group
- Make adjustments to new workplace practices and establish timeline for additional staff returns
- Return employees in phases or cohorts, allowing for integration and adoption of practices
- Have employees stagger start, break and stop times
- Have exempt staff return to work on a Monday to comply with [DOL salary requirements](#)

## Employee Health Screening

To support a healthy workplace, require employees exhibiting **COVID-19 symptoms** to stay home, and choose an employee screening method for identification of COVID-19 symptoms. This can be before the employee departs for work or immediately upon arrive. Be cautious of requiring employees to participate in COVID-19 diagnostic or antibody testing. The **EEOC** requires tests be accurate and reliable. Whichever method is chosen, ensure consistency and confidentiality of the process. Consider appointing a coordinator to manage and monitor screenings. Multiple coordinators may be needed if there is more than one work location. Note: The time nonexempt employees spend performing their health screenings before beginning work may be compensable - check state laws to ensure compliance.

### Types of screening

- Self-assessment and reporting only if symptomatic
- Self-reporting via technology (i.e. phone apps, POS or payroll system)
- Assessment performed by an assigned employee
- Assessment conducted by on-site medical staff

Below is a sample employee self-screening process.

Employee performs daily self-check of symptoms before arriving to work

If ill or symptoms detected, employee remains at home & notifies HR

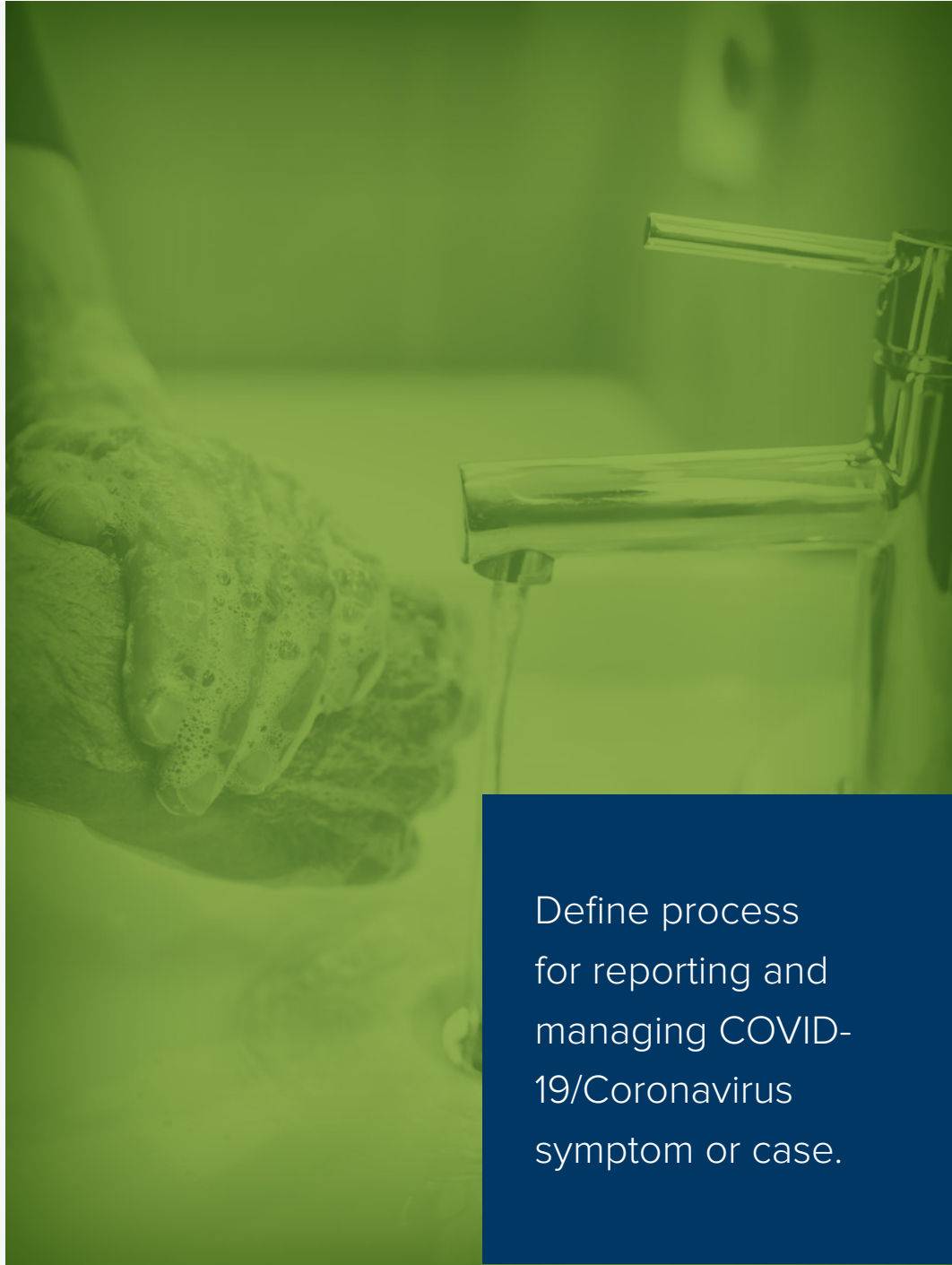
Employee self-quarantines & monitors symptoms per CDC guidelines

Employee returns when CDC discontinuation of home isolation criteria is met

Upon occasion, an employee may become ill or symptomatic at work. In advance of that, identify who employees will report their symptoms to. Once reported:

- Immediately isolate the employee in a private, enclosed location
- Ensure the employee is observing cough/sneeze and hand-washing etiquette
- Send the employee home and require them to self-quarantine as prescribed by the CDC
- Notify their supervisor when symptoms cease, in accordance with CDC guidelines for [discontinuing home isolation](#)

Businesses are strongly encouraged to have a process in place if an employee has a confirmed medical diagnosis of Coronavirus. The process should include notifying affected and exposed employees, the department of health, adhering to [OSHA requirements](#) for recording the illness, and performing deep cleaning and disinfecting of the affected work areas. Depending on which state the confirmed case is in, you may need to inform your workers' compensation carrier.



Define process for reporting and managing COVID-19/Coronavirus symptom or case.





## Create Policies And Procedures

Many people associate policies with legal compliance and risk mitigation, but these serve a broader purpose. As employees make the transition, procedures will educate employees about what they can expect from leadership and management, understand what is expected of them, and ensure consistency of messaging. These also support employee training and act as reference points. Just like your reentry roadmap, policies can be dynamic and updated as practices change.

## Recommendations

- 1. Exposure Control Plan:** Several cities and states are mandating that businesses develop written plans detailing how employers will manage:
  - Routine cleaning and disinfecting
  - Employee education on hygiene and handwashing
  - Personal protective equipment (PPE)
  - Employee health screenings
  - Identification and isolation of ill or symptomatic staff at work
  - Staff notification, contact tracing and deep cleaning if an employee tests positive
- 2. Social Distancing:** This policy can be standalone or part of an exposure control plan. See appendix for a [sample policy](#).
- 3. Employee Health Screenings:** Formalize process including who, how, when, and where screenings will be conducted, include confidentiality considerations.
- 4. Sick Leave:** Several government entities – federal, state and local – introduced sick leave requirements during the 1st and 2nd quarter of 2020. Revise policies to ensure compliance.
- 5. Employee Travel:** Revise the existing policy to address whether employee travel is allowed, clarify all requirements.
- 6. Expense Reimbursement:** With more employees working remotely, review current policy to ensure it captures what items can be expensed in the new environment.
- 7. Remote Work/Telecommute:** Update existing policies to reflect new practices.



## Prepare Employees


There is little doubt about the impact of this pandemic on employees and their families. Some have experienced loss of family or illness, while others are doing their best to manage fear, stress, and anxiety. Returning to work may exacerbate these feelings.

Leaders can aid employee reentry by ensuring transparency, communicating frequently and being aware that each employee may react differently.

## Recommendations

- Develop an employee communication strategy and timeline for sharing information before, during and after returning
- Draft speaking points for leaders and managers so all employees receive consistent information
- Host virtual or telephonic town halls to share initial reentry considerations and allow staff to ask questions
- Continue to obtain employee input through surveys
- Once the reentry plan is complete, communicate to employees about key decisions and new organizational roles
- Distribute the plan to staff and train them on new policies
- Educate employees about flexible work schedules and options for remote work
- Communicate about and arrange for completion of employment and/or benefit paperwork
- Consider potential bias and inequity for all employees
- Acknowledge that support systems (i.e. school, childcare, transportation) that allow people to work may not be present

Equip employees with information about Day 1 in the workplace, prepare and distribute a work packet with details (consider including PPE). Help set expectations by being candid about changes and explain what they can expect to experience. This can be done through a series of calls or video presentations that include details and photos of the new layout depicting the proposed daily routine at work.



“Phasing workers back into the office may create new uncertainties about personal safety and how to adapt to new routines.”

– [APA.org](https://www.apa.org)

## Employee Wellness

- Recognize employee mental, nutritional, and physical wellness is critical for safety
- Educate leaders and managers about COVID-19 related stress
- Craft support tools and resources for employees managing anxiety, fatigue, and stress
- Promote programs offered by EAP or healthcare providers
- Offer education about financial wellness and budgeting
- Encourage use of telephonic or online wellness programs
- Provide information about free community resources for medical, legal, housing and food services - see appendix for potential resources



# The First 30 Days In The Work Environment



## Day 1 of Return

- Perform health screenings
- Provide return to work package
- Orient employees to directional flow through the workspace
- Show them where they will work
- Highlight special requirements for workspaces such as where to place personal items and information about communal areas
- Train on cleaning procedures and location of supplies
- Check-in on employees to learn how they are settling in
- Be prepared to answer questions
- Consider a shortened workday to ease the transition



## Day 2-14 of Return

- Perform health screenings
- Be patient as employees learn the new processes
- Demonstrate flexibility as employees manage work and home
- Conduct a pulse survey or focus group to understand the employee experience (i.e. safety, productivity, engagement)
- Review physical layout and directional flow for effectiveness
- Educate employees about wellness resources
- Identify additional protocols needed



## Day 15-30 of Return

- Perform health screenings
- Develop a method for employees to provide ongoing feedback
- Assess if processes are working and make adjustments
- Review additional guidance from legal and regulatory bodies
- Review how staffing levels are meeting business/customer needs
- Communicate with both the pilot group and those working remote about learnings from the first 30 days
- Plan for the next wave of returning employees

# Sample Social Distancing Policy

## Purpose and Scope

This policy establishes “[social distancing](#)” as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) and other preventative measures to be followed at all [Company Name] worksites performing essential business operations allowed under applicable “Shelter-in-Place,” “Safer at Home,” other similar business restriction orders (collectively, “Local Orders”).

The social distancing measures specified here will establish the minimum requirements applicable to all covered worksites. Individual worksites may establish additional measures, as appropriate.

To the extent that anything in this protocol is inconsistent with more stringent requirements of applicable federal, state and/or local orders, or any other applicable federal, state and/or local laws, such applicable governmental orders and/or laws shall govern.

## Minimum Social Distancing Measures at Covered Worksites

Consistent with the CDC’s current recommendations, as well as to provide the safest possible work environment for our employees in light of COVID-19, our company will follow the social distancing guidelines listed below:

### Signage:

- Post signage regarding social distancing requirements, including:
  - The obligation to maintain at least six feet of distance between persons
  - Frequently washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and/or using hand sanitizer

# Sample Social Distancing Policy

- Covering coughs and sneezes with tissue or fabric, or, if not possible, into the sleeve or elbow and not the hand
- Avoiding handshakes and any unnecessary physical contact
- Avoiding all social interaction outside the household when sick with a fever or cough
- Post this Social Distancing Policy & Protocol near the entrance of the facility as well as provide copies to all employees.
  - All third parties whose physical presence at a covered worksite is deemed essential shall be covered under this protocol

## Measures to Protect Employee Health:

- Instruct all employees who can perform work remotely, from their home, to do so
- Instruct all employees that they should not come to work if sick
- Instruct all employees to wear a cloth mask while in the worksite
- Instruct all employees to maintain a six-foot distance between one another except as required to complete essential business activities
  - Permit only the minimum number of employees reasonably necessary to continue essential operations to be physically present at the worksite



## Sample Social Distancing Policy

- Move workstations to ensure that personnel are at least six feet apart, if necessary
- Flex shifts/hours to limit the number of people in the building at one time
- Disinfect high touch surfaces as well as objects expected to be used by multiple people.
- Our company will ensure that the following areas are disinfected twice daily:
  - Bathrooms and break rooms - including refrigerator handles, microwave handle and touchpad, knobs / faucets, manual toilet flush handles, and any other surface that employees are likely to touch
  - Building entrance door handles
  - Copy machines
  - Manual light switches
  - Shared equipment
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Provide hand sanitizer, soap and water, and disinfectant
  - Hand sanitizer and disinfectant are available near the entrance of the facility as well as in the following locations:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Sample Social Distancing Policy

- Soap and water are available in the following locations:

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## **Measures to Prevent Crowds from Gathering:**

- Limit the number of people who can enter the facility at one time
- To the extent that customer lines form, our Company is to ensure that customers maintain six feet of distance between one another

## **Measures to Prevent Unnecessary Contact:**

- To the extent that payment is tendered on-site, our Company is to ensure that contactless payment systems are used or that payment systems are disinfected after every use
- Instruct employees to maintain cleanliness in office break room / lunchroom areas, and ensure that reusable mugs or other items are limited to one person

# Resources Supporting Reentry

## **American Industrial Hygiene Association**

Recovering from COVID-19 building closures

## **Center for Workplace Mental Health**

Working remotely during COVID-19: Your mental health & well-being. American Psychiatric Association Foundation

## **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

CDC – Public health recommendations for community exposure

What to do if you are sick?

Caring for someone sick at home or other non-healthcare settings

Discontinuation of isolation for persons with COVID-19 not in healthcare settings

Interim guidance for businesses and employers to plan and respond to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)

General business frequently asked questions

Posters and videos on handwashing

## **Community Resources for Employee Wellness**

National information and referral service for those in need

National on-line referral services linking those in need with local free or reduced housing, food and medical care

National suicide prevention hotline

National domestic violence hotline

## **Department of Labor**

Families First Coronavirus Response Act questions and answers

Families First Coronavirus Response Act posters (multilingual)

## **Littler Mendelson**

Stay at Home – A national list of stay-at-home orders

A list of state-wide return to work protocols

## **National Alliance on Mental Illness**

COVID-19 resource and information guide

## **Occupational Safety and Health Administration**

COVID-19 overview and links

Guidance on preparing workplaces for COVID-19

## **Whitehouse**

Opening up America again

## **World Health Organization**

Coronavirus disease pandemic

Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak





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