

## Return to Work Planning – Quick Guide

### Decide When to Reopen

A number of factors, including state and local regulations, must be taken into consideration. When a business is ready to reopen, both to customers and to their furloughed and remote workforce, a number of steps should be taken.

### Prepare the Workforce

If the employees have been out of the facility for some time, some may have reservations about returning to work, while others will look forward to their return. Mitigating anxiety through change management planning and communication will assist in the transition. Businesses may wish to “bring back” employees in phases, or permit remote work for those who are considered “high risk” for the disease. Others may wish to focus on employees performing essential roles or those that require the use of equipment that is not available at home.

### Determine At-Risk Employees

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions may be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Based on current information, those medical conditions include:

- Chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
- Serious heart conditions
- Severe obesity (Body Mass Index [BMI] of 40 or higher)
- Diabetes
- Chronic kidney disease
- Liver disease
- Conditions which cause a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment, transplants, immune deficiencies, use of immune weakening medications

OSHA has released guidance for “Worker Exposure Risk to COVID-19,” based upon industry type and the need for contact within 6 feet of other people. OSHA divides job tasks into 4 risk exposure levels, as shown in the pyramid below.

- **Very High Exposure Risk:** Jobs with a high potential for exposure to sources of COVID-19 during specific medical, postmortem or laboratory procedures, such as healthcare and morgue workers.
- **High Exposure Risk:** Jobs with a high potential for exposure to known or suspected sources of COVID-19, such as healthcare delivery and support, medical transport and mortuary workers.
- **Medium Exposure Risk:** Jobs that require frequent/close contact with people who may be infected, but who are not known or suspected patients, such as those working in schools, high-population work environments and some high-volume retail settings.
- **Lower Exposure Risk (Caution):** Jobs that do not require contact with people known to be, or suspected of being, infected. Employees in this category have minimal occupational contact with the public and co-workers.



OSHA’s enforcement efforts are currently focusing upon facilities that house Very High and High jobs, and directs OSHA compliance officers to consult the most recent CDC recommendations for guidance in protecting workers.

## Modify the Workplace

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, your business may need to make modifications. Those could include:

- Separating workstations to ensure a 6-foot distance between each station
- Adding partitions to open floor plans or customer areas
- Limiting number of people in conference rooms and other common areas
- Removing chairs to limit the number of people sitting at a table
- Posting signs to remind employees of social distancing protocols and hand washing guidelines
- Establishing one-way walking paths around the office/facility to avoid any face-to-face collisions
- Placing markings on floors to reinforce social distancing
- Propping doors open to avoid unnecessary touching of door handles
- Opening windows and doors to increase airflow; changing filters in HVAC systems

## Modify In-Person Interactions

Your business may want to change protocols for in-person interactions, which could include:

- Restricting visitors and vendors
- Staggering work shifts or days, in order to limit the number of employees in the building at one time
- Using virtual meeting formats rather than holding in-person meetings
- Limiting the size of gatherings and meetings
- Encouraging employees to avoid sharing workstations or equipment
- Encouraging employees to avoid shaking hands
- Staggering lunch hours and break times to avoid having large groups of employees gathering in common areas
- Reminding employees to continue social distancing by remaining at least 6 feet away from other employees in all areas, including stairwells, elevators, kitchens, conference rooms and other common areas

## Clean and Disinfect the Workplace

Before re-opening, clean and disinfect the workplace, and establish a plan for on-going cleaning.

- Focus especially upon high-touch areas such as light switches, door knobs, cabinet pulls, faucet handles, elevator buttons, railings, keyboards and mice, telephones and copiers
- Clean tables used for eating, both before and after each use
- Provide cleaning supplies and require employees to clean their own areas each day
- Provide adequate amounts of hand sanitizer, soap and paper towels

## Employee Health Screening

Remind employees of symptoms of COVID-19 and that they should stay home (or go home) if they are showing any signs. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. Employers may want to conduct temperature screenings, although fevers are not the only symptom and may not be the best indicator. According to the CDC, symptoms include:

- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fever
- Chills
- Muscle Pain
- Sore throat
- New loss of taste or smell

## If an Employee is Sick

Employees who test positive for COVID-19 or believe they have been infected should follow the medical advice provided to them. The following chart provides general guidance for determining when an employee can return to work.

When an Employee Can Return to Work		
<b>If an employee had symptoms but was not tested for COVID-19, the employee can return to work when all of the following are true:</b>	<b>If an employee tested positive for COVID-19, the employee can return to work when all of the following are true:</b>	<b>If an employee did NOT have symptoms but tested positive for COVID-19, the employee can return to work when one of the following is true:</b>
The employee has not had a fever for at least 72 hours and has not used fever-reducing medication during that time AND	The employee no longer has a fever AND	The employee has still not developed any symptoms and ten days have passed since the date of the first positive test
Coughs and other symptoms have improved AND	Coughs and other symptoms have improved AND	OR The employee has received two negative COVID-19 tests in a row
Ten days have passed since the employee first experienced symptoms	The employee has received two negative COVID-19 tests in a row	

In most cases, a business does not need to shut down in the case of an ill employee. According to current CDC guidelines, if it has been less than 7 days since the sick employee has been in the facility, close off any areas used for prolonged periods of time by the sick person and then clean and disinfect the area. If it has been more than 7 days since the sick employee used the facility, additional disinfection is not necessary but continue routinely cleaning and disinfecting all high-touch surfaces in the facility.

## Use of PPE

Depending upon the industry, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) may be required. If not, employers may choose to recommend or require the use of PPE such as gloves and face masks, especially for those whose jobs must be performed within close distance of others. Training on the correct use of PPE should be provided.

## Communication

It is imperative to communicate these steps to employees and ensure that each person in the facility is trained and familiar with the details of the plan.

## Stay Flexible

The rapidly changing nature of the pandemic indicates that further changes and modifications may need to be made over time, so it's important to remain flexible and adaptive. Frequent two-way communication between employer and employees, and clearly set expectations, will increase the likelihood of success while reopening the business.