

Return to Work Checklist for Employers

What you should consider as you plan to reopen your office to employees, customers, and vendors

As stay-at-home orders are lifted and nonessential businesses resume operations, there's a lot for organizations to consider before they reopen their doors. What's more, many of these considerations are workplace-specific and could be more involved depending on the industry you operate in. As you build your plan for reopening, be sure to check off these important considerations.

Timing Considerations

Your timeline for reopening can't exist in a vacuum. State and local guidance will impact your plan. So will your ability to obtain the safety equipment necessary to support your plan. With so much in flux, you may need to create multiple scenarios that include:

- State and local guidance
- Phased opening as outlined in [federal guidance](#)
 - Current state: Office closure/remote work
 - Phase 1: maximum of 10 essential employees
 - Phase 2: maximum of 50 employees
 - Phase 3: all employees
- Rehire deadlines for loan forgiveness under the [CARES Act Paycheck Protection Program \(PPP\)](#)

Communication

Communication is critical in this season of unknowns. You are likely already receiving questions from your employees, customers, and vendors. You're trying to plan, and so are they. Frequent, clear communication about the steps you are taking builds confidence and directly impacts the success of your eventual reopening.

- Employees
 - Conduct a survey to assess employee concerns around reopening
 - Share your timeline for reopening, even if the dates aren't finalized. Include other timelines impacting your plan as well as other noteworthy considerations; such as the arrival date of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
 - Define work schedules and highlight critical changes to your traditional schedule and/or the schedule you have followed during safer-at-home
 - Outline new office norms
 - Provide guidelines for in-person meetings
 - Group meetings
 - Client meetings
 - List the safety protocols established
 - Share policy updates
 - Highlight all revised policies (e.g. PTO, remote work, etc.)
 - Restate existing policies that are still applicable

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- Clients and Vendors
 - Solicit feedback on your plan from key clients and vendors
 - Share your reopen date
 - Explain new office and safety protocols
 - Provide guidelines for visitors and in-person meetings

Physical Considerations

Review your office space with a critical eye for social distancing challenges, and consider taking these steps:

- Perform a walk-through of the premises to identify hazards
- Reconfigure workspaces to ensure 6 feet social distance and add partitions in smaller spaces
- Add signage to remind employees of social distancing norms
 - Create one-way traffic flow to prevent crowding in hallways
 - Clearly mark waiting areas and display the company's policy re: hygiene, social distancing and expectations for visitors
- Reconfigure common areas to enforce social distancing
- Update air filtration systems
- Install automatic doors
- Install no-touch soap dispensers and sinks in bathrooms and kitchen
- Identify shared technology surfaces (e.g. remote controls, postage meters) and consider alternative devices and/or provide sanitation wipes beside each shared technology surface
- If you are a tenant of a larger space, obtain the safety plans of your building, and fold those into your plan.
- Consult [OSHA guidelines](#)

Office Operations

To resume operations, you'll need to unwind many of the changes you made for safer-at-home. You also need to factor in how space and schedule changes may impact your work process.

- Reschedule mail delivery
- Contact vendors and carriers to re-establish services
- Secure vendor for weekly deep cleaning of office space
- Un-forward phones
- Establish workplace protocols
 - Set a limit on number of employees allowed in office at one time and/or in a single work area
 - Revise work hours and schedules
 - Develop guidelines for in-person group and client meetings
 - Revisit the frequency of management and/or team check-ins to drive accountability
- Order supplies
 - Masks, gloves, sanitizers, signage, space dividers, stickers (to indicate completion of check-in process)
- Determine if visitors will be limited to essential services only

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Staffing

Surveying your team early in the return to work planning process may help you identify potential challenges with this critical process.

- Contact furloughed or laid-off employees about returning to work
- Update payroll system with salary and wage changes
- Partner with Human Resources to insure employees are returned to work properly
- Update your PPP loan forgiveness calculation
- Determine who is charged with daily and weekly safety tasks and train as needed

Safety

Return to work isn't a one-time event. Plan for how you can best guarantee your employees' safety on a daily basis.

- Determine steps for re-entry:
 - Create a temperature check log
 - Draft a safety questionnaire
 - PPE issued (masks, gloves – if required, provide)
- Sanitizing – Determine schedule and assign responsibility
 - Sanitizers throughout office
 - Daily cleaning of common spaces
 - Workspaces (each employee), daily upon arrival and departure
- Address hazard areas
 - Restrooms
 - Kitchens – Remain closed or stagger usage
- Establish Personal Hygiene Protocols
- Provide training on the effective use of PPE including how to put on, take off, clean, and store

Employee Relations – Items to Consider

Successful plans anticipate what might not go according to plan.

- What if
 - an employee doesn't want to return?
 - an employee wants to remain remote or increase remote work status?
 - an employee has health concerns?
 - someone doesn't observe hygiene or social distancing guidelines while in the office?

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Policies That May Need Updates

Review your employee handbook and employee policies to identify necessary revisions which may include:

- PTO: Will you need to revise your PTO carryover?
- Remote work policy, including who can remain full time and part time, who can't, why, how often, and requirements to report to work, if any
- Reporting a positive diagnosis of COVID-19: Establish policy for employees to report who either become infected or came in contact with someone who did.
- Assessing Risk: Review all positions and determine which positions are at higher risk (e.g. sales team, those in direct contact with the public, etc.). Ask employees to self-report (only to an individual to ensure HIPPA compliance) if they have underlying health conditions (yes or no, not specifics) to ensure additional safety measures, as needed.

Compliance – Things You Should Know

While the COVID-19 pandemic has created a great deal of transparency in many organizations, employers are still limited in certain communications.

- Employers can ask about COVID symptoms, but not symptoms of any other illness
- Employers can't ask about underlying health conditions
- Employers can't release names of infected employees, only that someone has tested positive and trace employee interactions

Cash Flow

While reopening may dramatically improve top line revenue, there are short-term expenses to consider. At a minimum, capture and plan for the following:

- Employee salary and wage adjustments for budgeting and PPP loan expense tracking
- Expenses associated with retrofitting your space and PPE
- Planned labor and overtime associated with new safety protocols
- PTO carried over by employees unwilling or unable to take planned vacations this fiscal year

As the COVID-19 pandemic evolves so will your plan and your business. Plan with an evergreen mindset so that you can update and unwind changes as needed. Consider the long-term value of your work for business continuity planning and look for opportunities to learn from today's difficulties to emerge stronger and ready for the next big challenge.