



Best practices and points to ponder for creating your plan to return to work.



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*The material is intended for informational purposes only and does not include state or local guidance. Further, it should not be used for legal or medical advice related to COVID-19. Please consult a legal or medical professional for further instruction. The material follows the guidance of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and OSHA.*

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has interrupted many businesses across the country. We don't have a reason why this pandemic started or how long COVID-19 will continue to affect organizations, but on the flipside, many employers are looking forward to having their employees return work and to open the facility. To prepare for reopening your facility and welcoming employees back, it's imperative that your leadership team creates and communicates the return to work plan. The Valuable Resources team has created a short guide to help you start to think about what your plan will look like. The material we put together is compiled by our clients' concerns, employees' questions leaderships' decisions and facts from CDC and state and local agencies. Be patient and be flexible because once your plan is complete, you may need to change your plan based on the results of the COVID-19 interruption. For more assistance, please don't hesitate to contact us.

## First Things First

Employers have the liberty to implement a return to work plan as they see fit. Your plan is specific to your industry. Employment practices must still adhere state and local compliance and specific information must remain confidential. A few of those things are:

- All employers must adhere to Health Insurance Portability Privacy Act, 1996 (HIPAA), which means all medical information must be kept confidential.
- An employee with COVID-19 symptoms should ONLY be shared with members of company management on a need to know basis.
- The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission permits employers to measure employees' body temperatures before allowing them to enter your workplace.
- All new guideline and policies relating to COVID-19 that are implemented to ensure a safe environment must still be on a nondiscriminatory basis.

## Points to Ponder to Return to Your Facility

If your business was deemed nonessential, you may have had to close temporarily or change the way your business operates. Regardless the COVID-19 interruption has led to significant turbulence and caused anxiety and many are grieving the loss of our normalcy.

As a result, the interruption has had a critical impact to your bottom line. However, as we head towards reopening businesses and their facilities there are still many questions. States are opening again, but that doesn't mean that COVID-19 isn't here to stay. COVID-19 is a continued risk to you, your employees and your business. Enclosed are points to ponder and steps to implement. Some will be easier than others, some will be much more complicated, but it's not impossible.

### Your Employees

- *May be vulnerable* - some employees have preexisting conditions; other employees may have family members with preexisting conditions and may take care of their elderly parents etc.
- *May have children* and right now, daycare, school, camps etc. are closed.
- *Want to collaborate* – therefore, identify high-risk areas where your employees typically collaborate. Such as the conference rooms, break room, lunchroom, locker rooms for fitness or park district employers etc.

- *Utilize essential* areas such as bathroom, elevator, stairs, and hallways, etc.
- *May share* an office suite or desk, machinery, equipment, manufacturing can share equipment and plant floor space.
- *May have customers* who visitor and if so, perhaps avoid having any visitors to your facility for an extended length of time.
- *Need your leadership team to be*
  - *Flexible*
  - *Transparent*
  - *Candid and Provide expectations*

## Points to Ponder to Modify Your Workplace and Your Employees' Workstations

To prevent the spread of COVID-19 and the expectations of social distancing, your company will most likely need to make office modifications. These workplace modifications are based on social distancing protocols, which may also be required by state and local agencies.

Your business's social distancing plan will be unique to your industry and nature of work, and your company's facility. However, points to ponder when creating a social distancing plan to modify your office space:

1. **Workplace procedures**—To keep employees safe, leadership will need to implement new procedures for in-person interactions and physical contact. Points to ponder and some suggested changes include the following:

- Establish and enforce correct Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when and where and most common are masks and gloves
- *Masks* – are, as of right now, a mandate. Therefore, until this mandate changes, employees are expected to wear a disposable mask when in common areas.
  - They do not have to wear a mask when they are at their own cube or in their own office.
  - They will need to wear a mask when employees enter another employee's space; they are both expected to wear their masks.

### *Tips*

- Always **AVIOD** touching your eyes, face and mouth
- DO NOT touch your personal electronic devices without cleaning it first
- *Gloves*
  - Employees should wear disposable gloves in common areas. Especially in high touch areas, like elevators, stairways, door handles etc.
  - They do not need to wear gloves when alone in their own office or cube
- *Face Shields* – are available at specific manufacturers
  - Face Shields can be ordered (*VRC can assist in ordering these for your organization*).
  - Can be worn either with or without a mask.

2. **Minimizing employee collaboration** – The idea of returning to your facility is to start to minimize the isolation. Some points to ponder and small steps to incorporate:

- Minimize crowds by having a specific amount of people permitted in one place/in your facility at a time, limit the amount of employees when they gather
  - Avoid having outside visitors
  - Limit the amount of people for in-person meetings mainly in a conference room and ensure 6 feet apart
  - Encourage virtual meetings even if you are in the office
  - For those sharing workstations, reassign employees to a different workstation not to share the computer, phone, keyboard, mouse, equipment and other essential office supplies etc.
  - Rotate employees' work hours/shifts and meal/lunch times and/or break times
3. **Employee work schedules** —To minimize the number of employees at your facility at any given time, if applicable, you may opt to change your employees' work hours and/or days. Some points to ponder and suggested changes include the following:
- If your business can support and operate with employees working remotely, you may opt to continue all employees to work remotely. If not, other suggestions may be:
  - Only essential employees in the office
  - Rotate or stagger shifts/hours/days
  - If employees are not able to have access to the lunch area and the essentials for lunch and or coffee and water, perhaps working half days may be an option.
  - For those employees who travel, prohibit travel for the next several of months or if employees want to travel, they may have the option to so.
  - 1 person per department or leadership to be on-site each week with a rotation in schedules. The other days can be optional.

*Tip if your budget can afford to provide lunch, perhaps a lunch allowance for each department, or order in lunch via curbside once a week.*

4. **Physical workspace modifications**—Because COVID-19 spreads through close contact, employers may need to make changes to employees' desks or workstations, and overall floor plans. Some points to ponder and suggested changes include the following:
- Separating desks and workstations to ensure that there are 6 feet between each station
  - Adding partitions to open floor plans
  - Adding shields to open area desks and perhaps cubes
  - Closing common spaces, including conference rooms, break rooms and cafeterias
  - Modifying high-touch surfaces (I.e., propping doors open) to avoid employees unnecessarily touching surfaces
  - Posting signage around the office to remind employees of social distancing protocols
  - Establishing contactless drop zones for all deliveries including mail, packages and food
  - Postpone all workplace visitors and vendors for a length of time

## Clean Then Disinfect Your Facility

Before you reopen the workplace, you will need to decide who will clean and disinfect your facility. An option is to hire a professional cleaning service. However, if that is not an option, points to ponder and some helpful recommendations:

1. **Expect your employees to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

- Wear PPE - including disposable gloves and a disposable mask, and eye protection while you're cleaning the workspace.
2. Always **AVOID** touching your eyes, face and mouth, while cleaning and disinfecting
3. DO NOT touch your personal electronic devices, while you clean. If you do, be sure to wipe it down afterwards with disinfectant.
4. Clean first, then disinfect—Typically, disinfectant works best on already clean surfaces. Therefore, clean then disinfect. Pay close attention to the following areas:
- High-touch common surfaces
  - Light switches, door handle, plate covers, cabinets, sinks, stair railings, countertops, beverage machines, (i.e. coffee pots, hot water) microwaves, refrigerators, office supplies, key cards, door bell and elevator buttons, if applicable)
  - Employee workstations
  - Electronics
  - Tables, chairs and desks, from the lobby to the conference room
  - Front door, entry way, employee office doors, conference rooms and exits etc.
  - Don't share pens

*For more information contact CDC <https://bit.ly/CDC2020guide>*

5. **Replace your office air filters**—Talk to your building owner or your building management to learn more about the filters used in your HVAC systems.

6. Before we knew that COVID-19 was a pandemic, many of our clients created a schedule for each employee to clean and disinfect the office. Each employee chose a day and time for the task. There was a checklist to initial when the task was complete.

## Options for Employees with Children

Parents are looking for options for where to bring their children when they return to work. Many employees have asked the questions, can I bring my children to work? where do I bring them since many places of daycare and camps are closed? Do I just stay home and work remotely? If your business can support and operate with employees working remotely, you may opt to continue all employees to work remotely. If not, other suggestions may be:

- Call your local daycare, YMCA or camps to find out if they are open
- Research local daycares, YMCA or camps to research and understand their operations and safety guidelines if they are open <https://www.kindercare.com/lp/safety-first>
- If daycare is not an option, another alternative may be to hire a high school or teenager as a nanny or sitter. Use specific safety guidelines addressed regarding social distancing, cleaning and disinfecting the space.
- Perhaps employees may be able to work half days and children will only be in daycare half the day instead of a full day.
- Hire a family member that you see regularly
- Find a parent group on social media

## Screening your Employees

Part of your new operation may be to screen your employees prior to entering your facility. A few points to ponder:

- Establish if you want employees to be screened before entering the building
- Decide who will do the screening, many companies may have a nurse on-site.
- Be sure to communicate your decision to screen employees.
- The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission permits employers to measure employees' body temperatures before allowing them to enter your workplace.
- Any employee screening MUST be implemented on a nondiscriminatory basis.

## What to do if someone is Exposed and Confirmed COVID-19?

### According to the CDC Quarantine is different from Isolation

**Quarantine** is used to keep someone who might have been *exposed* to COVID-19 away from others. Quarantine helps prevent spread of disease that can occur before a person knows they are sick or if they are infected with the virus without feeling symptoms. People in quarantine should:

- Stay home
- Separate themselves from others
- Monitor their health
- Follow directions from their state or local health department

**Isolation** is used to separate people infected with the virus (those who are *sick* with COVID-19 and those with no symptoms) from people who are not infected. People who are in isolation:

- Should stay home until [it's safe for them to be around others](#).
- In the home, anyone sick or infected should separate themselves from others by staying in a specific "sick room" or area and using a separate bathroom (if available).

## Review Your Workplace Policies/Handbook

Workplace policies are constantly changing. Now is a good time to update and make modifications to your policies. You may need to revisit your sick and PTO policy and your remote working policy amongst others.

## One Plan does not Fit all

One plan does not fit all. We know that there are plenty more questions and as your strategic partner, we will help you ask the questions you may not be thinking about. We offer you guidance to implement the changes in your office along with new policies and procedures that need to be implemented. We will help you customize your plan that fit your organization, your business and your culture. To help with this process, please contact Valuable Resources, Co. [lhuspen@vrc-hr.com](mailto:lhuspen@vrc-hr.com) or 847-401-0014. We are here to help.

Thank you and Stay Well.