

RETURN TO WORK

Your Return to Work Checklist: Preparing the Workplace

Navigating Return to Work

Navigating the Return to Work

After months of lockdown, millions of businesses are preparing to make the return to the office. While this is uncharted territory, there are best practices and general safety guidelines that we can lean on as we organize our return-to-work strategies.

New and rapidly-improving workplace safety protocols, for example, are making it easier for employers to visualize what a safe reopening process might actually look like. The main goals of these new guidelines are to maximize safety and minimize the spread of COVID-19 after employees return to the physical workplace.

Now for some important caveats: Most states and localities have executive orders regulating reopening offices, and some of these have very specific requirements (and in some cases, industry-specific requirements). Be sure to check applicable state and local regulations for the most relevant and up-to-date guidance. Every workplace is unique in terms of size, business model, number of employees, and layout, which will also make it necessary for employers to know how to modify these rules in order to apply them to their own workplace.

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With all of that in mind, we've created a checklist to help you get started on thinking about what you can do to design a maximally safe workplace during the return to work.


This list is by no means exhaustive, so be sure to take a look at the other resources linked here and to discuss any regulatory considerations applicable to your particular business with your legal counsel.

These include:

- 1. Educate yourself on federal, state, and local guidelines and requirements with respect to COVID-19 and returning to work**
- 2. Implement — and educate employees about — workplace social distancing policies.**
- 3. Provide employees with the tools and information they'll need to keep the office clean.**
- 4. Redesign your workplace to make it as easy as possible for employees to follow social distancing measures.**



This Checklist Is Interactive!

The  icon indicates a clickable page.

* Keep in mind that these new guidelines and regulations are by no means fixed — they will continue to change along with our understanding of COVID-19, so your approach should be flexible as well and you should have a regular cadence in place to review and re-evaluate your approach.



1. Educate yourself on federal, state, and local guidelines and requirements with respect to COVID-19 and returning to work

- ☐ Review this [COVID-19 State Reopening Guide](#) to find more information about state-specific reopening plans, which in some cases include specific obligations with respect to workplace safety measures.
- ☐ Review the CDC's [Resuming Business Toolkit](#), [Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#), and [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) landing page](#). Check back often for the latest information, as the CDC has continued to update these resources throughout the pandemic.
- ☐ Review OSHA's [website](#), [Guidance on Returning to Work](#), and [Revised Enforcement Guidance](#).
- ☐ Review the EEOC's [guidance](#) regarding compliance with equal employment opportunity laws in relation to COVID-19.
- ☐ Consult your legal advisor on how these considerations impact your business.

2. Implement — and educate employees about — workplace social distancing policies.

- ☐ Consider a phased reopening focused on bringing back the most essential workers first and staggering other workers' return. Consider other approaches, such as developing a work schedule that has employees alternate between working remotely and coming into the office (which limits the total number of employees in the office at any one time) and other flexible work arrangements.



- ☐ Perform daily health screenings (which may be required by state or local regulation), have a protocol for handling confirmed or suspected cases, and provide flexibility for employees who suspect they may be sick or exposed to COVID-19 or who have heightened vulnerability, bearing in mind privacy obligations with respect to medical information and other obligations under [equal employment opportunity laws](#).
- ☐ Check state/local requirements around wearing personal protective equipment (PPE). If it's not already required, follow CDC guidelines regarding PPE and consider making it mandatory for employees to wear face masks or other face coverings while at work.
- ☐ Consider adopting measures to limit the number of people in an enclosed area (like break rooms or conference rooms) at any given time, keeping in mind that some state and local return-to-work regulations require employers to restrict the use of such spaces.
- ☐ Prohibit physical contact between employees (hugs, handshakes, etc.)
- ☐ Prohibit the sharing of office equipment (pens, coffee mugs, staplers, etc.) between employees.
- ☐ Create a training plan to teach managers and employees about your new social distancing policies (as well as about any disciplinary measures that will follow from not complying with the new measures).

3. Provide employees with the tools and information they'll need to keep the office clean.

- ☐ Place bottles of hand sanitizer in strategic locations throughout the workplace. Hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol should be made readily available at employee workstations and in all common areas, for use when soap and water is not immediately available
- ☐ Maintain a supply of tissues and sanitizing wipes for your office so that employees can clean common use equipment such as kitchens, lounges, eating areas, at printing stations, and in conference rooms



- ☐ Hand washing protocol as taken from [CDC guidance](#) must be taught and continually reinforced, with signs and postings educating employees as to the new etiquette.
- ☐ Consider installing touch-free sinks, soap and sanitizer dispensers, and trash cans.
- ☐ Depending on state and local guidance, you might close alternating stalls and urinals or install additional partitions.
- ☐ In kitchens, provide single-use cutlery, plates, and condiments and single-serving snacks; or potentially bar the use of kitchens altogether.
- ☐ Consider making it mandatory for employees to use gloves while handling communal equipment.
- ☐ Perform routine cleaning and disinfecting schedules, especially for high-touch surfaces (such as couches, kitchen areas, doorknobs, etc.).
- ☐ Ensure ventilation systems operate properly, and if possible, modify or increase ventilation systems to provide acceptable indoor air quality.

4. Redesign your workplace to make it as easy as possible for employees to follow social distancing measures.

- ☐ Use colored tape or other visual cues to indicate “one-way” pathways throughout the office.
- ☐ Consider also using these visual cues to delineate six-foot intervals on the floor of public areas (such as break rooms, conference rooms, etc.).
- ☐ Designate separate doorways for entering and exiting the office (to make it easier for foot traffic to flow in only one direction).
- ☐ Make sure employee workspaces are situated at least six feet apart from one another per the CDC’s [social distancing guidelines](#).



- ☐ Consider [partitions](#) between employee workspaces to limit physical interaction if your office has an open floor plan.
- ☐ Research, review, and implement all of the relevant social distancing policies that are in place at the state and local levels.
- ☐ Limit the number of people in enclosed areas at any given time by restricting the number of chairs that are available.
- ☐ Perform as many functions and services remotely as possible.
- ☐ Make it mandatory for meetings to be held virtually whenever possible.

Resources for Further Learning

Remember, you are not alone in this effort.

Be sure to review our guide to [Navigating the Return to Work](#), a helpful resource that's continually updated with answers to frequently asked questions around organizing a safe and optimized return to work.

Want more return-to-work information? [Download our Policy and Procedures Checklist here.](#)



Want To Get Started?

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