RETURN TO WORK

Your Return To Work Checklist: Policy and Procedures

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.

Your Return To Work Checklist: Policy and Procedures

A successful return to work starts with employers understanding and then adopting the appropriate safety measures. The specifics of your strategy will necessarily depend on your business model, the structure and layout of your workplace, and applicable state and municipal laws and government orders. In other words, no two return to work strategies will look exactly alike.

That said, there are a few general steps that employers should take in order to ensure a maximally safe and responsible return to work for their employees.

These include:

1. **Understand and Incorporate Government Requirements and Recommendations**

2. **Time your Workplace Reopening Appropriately**

3. **Consider a Multi-phased Return-to-work Strategy**

4. **Re-onboarding Considerations**

5. **Communicate Closely and Carefully with Your Employees**

6. **Minimize (or restrict) all nonessential work-related travel**

7. **Conduct Discretionary Health and Safety Procedures**

This Checklist Is Interactive!
The 👆 icon indicates a clickable page.

1.   Understand and Incorporate Government Requirements and Recommendations

☐   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.

☐   Review the employer paid leave requirements that have been implemented as part of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) and determine how you will communicate with managers, team leaders, and employees about the new FFCRA paid leave requirements.

☐   Consult your legal advisor on how these considerations impact your business.

2.   Time your Workplace Reopening Appropriately

☐   Research and understand the COVID-19-reopening restrictions that are in place in your locations.

☐   Consider whether you are able to return employees to work safely given the particular circumstances in your location and workspace, taking into account federal, state, and local requirements and guidelines regarding worker safety.

☐ Give your team ample time to institute physical changes to your workspace and any policy changes you may require.

☐ **Ask yourself:**

→ "If we were to reopen, can we count on our business' supply chain to also be fully operational?"

→ "Are there other, similar businesses in the area that are also starting to reopen?"

3. Consider a Multi-phased Return-to-work Strategy

☐ If you decide to reintroduce employees back into the workplace gradually rather than all at once, make sure to use objective, non-discriminatory criteria for determining which positions to return to work.

☐ Consider staggering shifts, voluntary call-backs, and other options for returning to the workplace.

☐ Be prepared to respond to employees who do not wish to return to the workplace and to requests for accommodations, keeping in mind obligations under equal employment opportunity laws.

☐ **Ask yourself:**

→ "Are there any employees who will be absolutely essential to have in the workplace once the reopening process begins?"

→ "Should seniority privileges be invoked when determining which employees will be among the first to return to work?"

→ "Will it be necessary for us to have all of our employees return to the workplace at once? Or is it possible to gradually reintroduce some essential employees while others continue to work remotely?"

4. Re-onboarding Considerations

☐   Consider whether previously furloughed or terminated employees need to be re-onboarded prior to returning to your team.

☐   Consider whether you want all employees to acknowledge new COVID-related policies before entering the workspace.

☐   **Consult with your legal advisors about:**

→ "Do I need to provide new offer letters, wage statements, and other new-hire documents and notices to returning employees?"

→ "Do I need to re-verify employment eligibility?"

→ "What new written policies do I want to institute in light of COVID-19?"

5. Communicate Closely and Carefully with Your Employees

☐   Make it your goal to deliver consistent and clear-eyed information to your team about the return to work in order to reduce anxiety among your employees.

☐   Build a communication strategy that's centered around reaching out to team members personally whenever new and relevant information becomes available.

☐   Designate company leaders to respond to questions and concerns.

☐ **Ask yourself:**

→ "What sorts of updates will need to be shared, and who will they need to be shared with?"

→ "How will we soothe the anxiety of employees who are apprehensive about returning to work?"

→ "What will be the most effective way to communicate with employees about the return to work process?"

6. Minimize (or restrict) all nonessential work-related travel

☐ Consider adopting policies that prohibit employees from all unnecessary business travel.

☐ **Ask yourself:**

→ "What qualifies as "nonessential work-related travel?"

→ "If an employee does need to travel for work, what system will the company use to make sure that they stick to the agreed-upon itinerary?"

→ "Should it also be mandatory for employees to notify us of any plans for personal travel?"

7. Conduct Discretionary Health and Safety Procedures

There are certain safety measures and best practices that you should consider implementing, and which may even be required under state and local reopening regulations that apply to your company. Here are just a few to highlight:

Before entering the office:

☐ Establish a policy that details symptoms that would make it necessary for an employee to stay home, or expand your existing list to include coronavirus symptoms detailed by the CDC.

☐ Implement a health screening protocol that includes regular temperature checks, keeping in mind these important considerations.

☐ Develop a protocol for handling suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the workplace.

While in the office:

☐ Limit the number of people that are allowed in common areas at any one time, and implement other basic social distancing measures, such as separating workspaces by more than six feet and/or protective guards.

☐ Make it mandatory that employees wear face coverings and any other appropriate PPE while at work.

☐ Offer more flexible workday schedules and split shift options.

☐ Provide personalized accommodations for employees based on their personal circumstances (some will have caregiving responsibilities, for example, or pre-existing medical conditions that put them at risk).

☐ Provide regular cleaning and sanitizing of the workplace, including twice-daily for high-touch surfaces.

☐ Promote employee hygiene and handwashing.

☐ **Ask yourself:**

→ "What steps will be taken to ensure the privacy of an employee who has received a COVID-19 test?"

→ "What will the company's policy and procedure be if an employee tests positive for COVID-19?"

→ "Will employees be compensated for the time that's required for temperature checks and/or COVID-19 tests?"

Resources for Further Learning

If you're feeling overwhelmed, remember: you're not alone. There are millions of other business leaders like you who are hard at work trying to get their businesses back on track as soon as possible. As a result, there are tons of online resources out there which can provide you with some clarity and direction as you navigate the return to work process.

Here are a few that we recommend checking out:

→   [“A Guide to Reopening Your Business” (US Chamber of Commerce)](#)

→   [“State-by-State Business Reopening Guidance” (US Chamber of Commerce)](#)

→   [“A Guide to Employee Temperature Checks” (SHRM)](#)

→   [Employee Temperature and Health Screening list (Littler)](#)

→   [“COVID-19: Considerations for Employee Testing” (National Law Review)](#)

We also recommend reviewing 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. And, again, we strongly recommend you consult your legal advisor before implementing your return-to-work strategy or any new COVID-19-related policies. Want more return-to-work information? [Download our Policy and Procedures Checklist here.](#)

Want To Get Started?

Call: (844) 749-7785 . Email: hello@justworks.com . Visit: justworks.com