

Best Practices: Returning Employees to Work Under COVID-19



As a result of the unprecedented Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, your organization may need to create a plan to re-open business locations and workplaces. Implement plans and strategies to expedite restoration of business operations while ensuring the health and safety of employees, customers, and visitors. When returning to the workplace basic steps need to be taken in order to allow for safe occupancy. Areas that needs to be considered are disinfecting, Heat, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Communication to your employees of procedures and practices, engineering controls, administrative controls, and PPE plans.

General Steps for Both Owned Facilities and Leased Facilities

- ▶ Complete cleaning of building with approved clean products to disinfect the location. (Finding approved EPA materials may be difficult so finding materials that are 70% Ethanol Alcohol or Isopropyl Alcohol will likely be the resources found for use)
- ▶ Focus on areas such as common areas, breakrooms, lunchrooms, and bathrooms
- ▶ Create a schedule for regular & frequent disinfecting of common areas
- ▶ Create, review, and promulgate communication to your employees prior to reopening to outline your disinfecting procedures, engineering, administrative controls, and PPE guidelines. (Providing peace of mind will be very important to ensure their safety and well-being of your employees for their safe return to the workplace.)
- ▶ If you will be providing PPE to employees, ensure you have sufficient supply. Plan on a burn rate 2-3 times higher than you would expect in order to have enough supplies.

Owned Facilities

- ▶ Ensure your HVAC systems are working properly. (Test and start HVAC system days before you expect occupancy)
- ▶ Work with either your cleaning contractor or your employees responsible for cleaning your facility to set up cleaning protocols and frequency.

Leased Facilities

- ▶ Contact your landlord to inquire what they have been doing regarding HVAC. Provide a time frame when you plan to return to occupancy. Provide them with an estimate of the workforce that will return so they can plan the proper level of cooling, heating.
- ▶ Review their plans for disinfecting the facility and the common areas such as elevators, hallways, and bathrooms.

Training

Train managers and supervisors on the following topics:

- ▶ Recognizing COVID-19 symptoms
- ▶ Taking COVID-19 precautions
- ▶ Responding to emerging employee/customer infection

Verify ability to work and health of all new or returning personnel.

- ▶ Utilize a health questionnaire.
- ▶ Implement pre-/post-work shift temperature checks. Employees should not be permitted to work with temperatures over 100.4°F.

Sample Health Questionnaire Questions

- ▶ Have you or an immediate family member living in your home returned from an international location within the last 14 days?
- ▶ Have you or an immediate family member living in your home returned from a domestic (US) COVID-19 epicenter in the last 14 days?
- ▶ Have you had close contact with or cared for someone diagnosed with COVID-19 within the last 14 days?
- ▶ Have you experienced any cold or flu-like symptoms in the last 14 days (to include fever, cough, sore throat, respiratory illness, difficulty breathing, gastrointestinal discomfort, or disease)?
- ▶ Acknowledgment of negative responses should be documented for each new or returning employee
- ▶ New and returning employees should be instructed to notify management of any emerging symptoms or potential person-to-person contact with an infected person

Provide Refresher Compliance Safety Training for All New and Returning Employees

Topics to cover include the following:

- ▶ Hazard communications (cleaning and disinfecting chemicals)
- ▶ Personal protective equipment requirements and process
- ▶ Bloodborne pathogens/infection control
- ▶ COVID-19 personal precautions

Face Covering/Masks

- ▶ Before putting on a mask/face covering clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water
- ▶ Fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face.
- ▶ Be secure with ties or ear loops
- ▶ Include multiple layers of fabric
- ▶ Allow for breathing without restrictions
- ▶ Cover mouth & nose with no gaps between your face and the face covering

Hand Washing

- ▶ Upon entering the office all staff must use an alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water
- ▶ After every meeting with another person, hands must be washed/cleaned
- ▶ Hands need to be cleaned before and after using common devices like refrigerators, microwaves.
- ▶ Hands need to be cleaned before and after using restroom facilities

Offices/Service Areas

- ▶ Post handwashing reminders and posters.
- ▶ Discontinue communal food and beverages, including coffee and water.
- ▶ Eliminate staff sharing of pens and pencils or other office items.

- ▶ Clean and disinfect high-touch and flat surfaces daily.
 - ▶ Telephones
 - ▶ Keyboards
 - ▶ Desks
 - ▶ Countertops
 - ▶ Calculators
 - ▶ Tape dispensers
 - ▶ Elevator doors
 - ▶ Knobs
 - ▶ Railings
 - ▶ Office furniture (chairs, stools, etc.)

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- ▶ PPE like gloves and face coverings should not be shared
- ▶ PPE should be considered a final means of defense not a primary means of protection

Revised Current Protocols

Modifying business operations and work practices in the post-COVID-19 environment can help discourage the transmission of contagious disease in the workplace. Add hand sanitizing dispensers, tissues, disposable wipes, no-touch disposal receptacles, and handwashing poster reminders at key locations in the workplace.

- ▶ Encourage non-contact methods of greeting.
- ▶ Implement a Duty to Warn procedure – if a COVID-19 exposure/outbreak is reported at a location.
- ▶ Consider continuous disinfection technologies.
- ▶ Encourage employees to perform daily self-health checks prior to returning to work.

Additionally, to open the workplace one of the requirements may be to keep all employees at a **minimum of six feet apart**. In order to accomplish that various strategies will need to be taken such as:

- ▶ New shifts
- ▶ Adjusting work hours
- ▶ Moving furniture or rearranging interior workspaces or seating arrangements
- ▶ Discouraging in person meeting, promoting virtual meetings
- ▶ Continuing remote work from home, alternatively rotating in office and work from home assignments

Evaluate your organization's infectious disease preparedness/response plan. Modify and update it as needed, considering the following factors:

- ▶ Supply chain resources
- ▶ Environmental strategies (cleaning and disinfecting practices)
- ▶ Staff/customer notifications
- ▶ Procedures for staff illness
- ▶ Procedures for customer illness

Conducting a Risk Assessment

When you conduct a risk assessment your primary goal is to identify hazards. You are looking for anything that may cause harm. You are looking for physical items, mental items, chemical items, and biological items.

- ▶ Walk through the workplace and observe things like it was for the first time, find physical items that now pose risks.
- ▶ Rate them low, medium, high.
- ▶ Do they pose a reasonable risk of transferring COVID-19 virus? Y/N
- ▶ Can it be eliminated? Y/N
- ▶ If it cannot be eliminated what can be done to minimize the risk? Frequent cleaning? Restricted access?
- ▶ Are we providing good piece of mind to our staff/visitors/contractors? Y/N
- ▶ Are the new cleaning products safe for our employees? Y/N
- ▶ Are the new cleaning products safe for our equipment? Y/N
- ▶ Does everyone understand the reasonable risks of COVID-19? Y/N
- ▶ Do we restrict access to your workplace to a single entry to monitor visitors and employees? Y/N
- ▶ Do we provide masks to visitors? Y/N
- ▶ Do we allow lunchrooms to be used? Y/N
- ▶ Do we place limits on the number of people in a break room? Y/N
- ▶ Do we create staggered breaks and lunches? Y/N

Finally, be prepared to modify and update your procedures as situation warrants and Federal, State and Local regulations change.

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