Transitioning back to the workplace
Introduction

As more and more people are vaccinated, many companies are eager to support their employees in returning to offices and other places of work.

Throughout the global COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that companies prioritize the health and safety of their employees and continually seek feedback and data to guide these critical decisions.

It is important to research and plan office setup requirements to help ensure a safe experience for any employee who chooses to use the office. Use feedback from your employees, peer companies, consultants, governmental agencies, the scientific community and medical professionals.

If you decide to move forward bringing employees back to your place of work, it is imperative you do so knowing that COVID-19 and the risk of the virus remains with us. It is still necessary to minimize the workplace risk by sharing broad-based knowledge about the disease and supporting the safety (physical, mental and emotional) of your employees and their families.

Encourage employees to be vaccinated. Learning the latest news about the available vaccines will help them make informed decisions for themselves and their families. Consider allowing employees time off with pay to receive a COVID-19 vaccination.

This sample guidance is based on information from accredited agencies. It summarizes recommended measures considered to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Even as this document was being developed, guidance was changing. It is designed to be customized for your business’ specific operations and needs and should be updated at least quarterly and potentially more frequently depending on developments regarding the spread of the virus.

Things to consider:

- Desk reservation system
- Automated daily screening check-in
- Formal flex-work program
- Post occupancy limits on boardrooms as appropriate.
- Understand your legal requirements for maintaining records before asking for copies of vaccination records.
- Make disposable masks and sanitizer stations available throughout your facility.
- Many landlords may have specific building protocols, separate from and perhaps more stringent than your company policies, that will need to be followed. Ensure all employees and visitors to the building are aware of these policies.
- There may be state or municipal requirements that also need to be communicated to your employees.
Table of contents

Employee responsibilities ........................................ 4
Manager responsibilities ........................................... 5
Reducing the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace ........................................... 6
Making your facilities ready ....................................... 9
Employee readiness .............................................. 11
Employee responsibilities

• Review your workplace’s safety guidelines and ensure you have provided any signed agreements or attestation (such as proof of vaccination or a negative COVID test) required to work in person at offices or facilities.

• Use a reservation system, if available, to reserve your workstation or office space. This can also be helpful for contact tracing if there is an outbreak of COVID-19 within your premises.

• Take your temperature before arriving at work. Do not come into the office if:
  - Your temperature is 100.4 or higher.
  - You do not feel well.
  - You have symptoms including fever, cough, shortness of breath, congestion or sore throat.
  - You have cared for or been in close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 within the past 14 days.

• Support one another in following company protocols. Share your experiences with your colleagues and provide feedback.

• If you see an instance of non-compliance by another employee, and you feel comfortable, suggest to that employee that they need to follow the protocol. If you do not feel comfortable, inform your manager so they can follow up and/or take the appropriate action.

• If you see a potential safety hazard or an opportunity to improve employee safety, please notify management.

• If you start to show COVID-19 symptoms while at work, it is important that you talk to your manager and immediately go home to ensure the safety and health of others in the building.
Manager responsibilities

• Establish a communication protocol when a COVID-19 case is reported to alert employees of office status in advance of their return, as well as the need for any possible COVID testing.

• Ensure it is within the company’s protocols before asking for an employee's vaccination status or for proof of a negative COVID test.

• As a manager, it is important to understand where your employees choose to work each day and provide the appropriate support. For example, if the desk reservation system does not have an available seat to reserve, you can connect with another manager or contact building or facilities department managers to find other options on those days.

• Ensure all of your employees (temporary or full time) who are going into an office, meeting with a customer or visiting another site to conduct company business, are aware that they must self-screen for COVID symptoms.

• Respect your employees’ choice to work from home or come into the office.

• If you come into the office, model the proper protocols (lead by example).

• If your employee informs you that another employee, who reports to a different manager, is not complying with these rules, follow up with their manager to help ensure a safe environment for everyone or reach out to employee relations for assistance.

• Ensure your employees are maintaining the occupancy limit that is set for your office location.
Reducing the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace

If you are unable to follow any company protocols and still need to come into the office, please contact your manager or Human Resources department before visiting and/or reporting to an office.

If you are concerned about an underlying medical condition, please contact your manager or Human Resources department before visiting and/or entering the office.

Good hygiene and physical distancing

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has provided guidance on best practices to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Physical distancing and good hygiene practices are two that are required. Good hygiene practices that must be followed in the office include:

- Utilize disinfectant wipes at each desk to clean the workstation.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use hand sanitizer (which should be made available throughout the office). Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub your hands together until they feel dry.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- DO NOT shake hands.
- Cover coughs and sneezes.
- Limit the number of physical materials distributed, such as printed documents. Electronic distribution should be utilized where appropriate.
Recommended physical distancing guidelines may include:

- Stay at least six feet from other people and wear a mask unless you are sitting at your workspace.
- Avoid contact with others, such as handshakes or embracing friends, coworkers or visitors.
- Avoid touching surfaces that have been touched by others, to the extent that is feasible.
- Avoid gathering in larger groups, especially inside, until the CDC advises it is safe to do so. This is regardless of vaccination status.
- Adhere to the maximum capacity limits posted outside of meeting/conference rooms.
- Do not conduct face-to-face in-person meetings where employees are not able to be at least six feet from one another. Utilize tools such as Teams or Zoom.

Use of masks in the office

As of this writing, the CDC and many other health agencies recommend masks should be worn in all indoor common areas and when physical distancing cannot be maintained, regardless of vaccination status. In some states and municipalities, this may be required. Even in states and municipalities without official recommendations on mask requirements, we recommend following the CDC guidance above. In general, a person is considered fully vaccinated two weeks after their second dose in a two-dose series (Pfizer or Moderna) or two weeks after a single-dose vaccine (Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine).

If you are not fully vaccinated, it is recommended to wear a mask or face covering and maintain physical distancing (six feet). This includes when moving about the office. Removal of the mask while sitting at your desk may be acceptable.

Employees may wear their own personal mask while in the office which may be a traditional face mask or other type of cloth face covering. If an employee elects to wear his or her own mask, it must be consistent with policies regarding conduct and dress code. If management identifies a concern related to the type of mask an employee is wearing, they should ask the employee to remove the mask and wear one issued by the company.

In addition, the personal mask or face covering must meet the following requirements outlined by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The mask must:

- Fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- Allow for breathing without restriction
- Be secured with ties or ear loops
- Be made of a fabric or material that can be laundered and machine dried, or hand-washed and dried properly without change to the shape of the mask
- Include two or more layers of fabric
Visitors and contractors

Require employees of third-party suppliers or contractors working in any facility to follow your mask policy unless their employer provides confirmation of a process in place that requires their employees to complete an attestation (or provide evidence) that they are vaccinated and have no symptoms.

If you allow business visitors or contingent workers, require the host manager to be responsible for managing the number of guests and workers so as not to exceed the allowable occupancy permitted. Require visitors and contingent workers to adhere to all company protocols including a self-performed health assessment before coming into your office.

COVID-19 symptoms at work protocols

If an employee or visitor starts to show COVID-19 symptoms while at work, they must leave the office immediately to ensure their own safety and health and the safety and health of others in the building. The individual’s host or manager should be notified so contact tracing can be completed.

Common symptoms of COVID-19 include but are not limited to:

- Fever
- Cough
- Difficulty breathing
- Sore throat
- Pressure in the chest
- Extreme fatigue
- Persistent headache
- Persistent loss of smell or taste

Additional information on symptoms can be located on the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Protection website.

If an employee starts to experience symptoms of COVID-19, they should take the following measures:

- Inform their manager that they are not feeling well. Their manager will then contact HR-Employee Relations or your Facilities Management team.
- If the employee is not in acute respiratory distress, they should be advised to go home immediately and contact their personal healthcare provider for further direction.
- If the employee is in acute respiratory distress, call local emergency medical services or 911.

If an employee is confirmed to test positive for COVID-19, their manager and Human Resources must be informed immediately. A protocol should be in place for conducting contact tracing and informing those in contact with the employee. In addition, enhanced cleaning protocols for any areas where the employee may have been should be carried out.
Making your facilities ready

To ensure a safe work environment, consider implementing the following:

- Remove contents from the top of work surfaces.
- Remove keyboards, mice and phones (where applicable) from workstations and offices to facilitate disinfection and cleaning. Encourage employees to bring their own equipment or have a cleaning process in place for shared equipment.
- Clean and disinfect workstations, private offices and common areas.
- Clean carpets, chairs and other upholstery.
- Implement physical distancing signage and plexiglass at reception and guard desk.
- Design distancing measures for use of workstations.
- Provide each office with a stock of personal protection supplies.

Workstation and private office, common areas, carpets, chairs and other cleaning

Ensure that:

- Work surfaces in the workstations and offices have been cleaned and disinfected using Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered cleaning products.
- All carpets, chairs and upholstery have been professionally steam-cleaned.
- All ice machines, coffee machines, water coolers and dispensers, water and bottle drinking fountains (where applicable) have been cleaned and serviced to be ready for reentry.
- Social hubs, tables in social hubs and meeting rooms, locker doors, entrances, restrooms and other high-touchpoint areas have been disinfected using EPA-registered cleaning products.
- New protocols have been established for the areas that are to be cleaned and disinfected.
The primary cleaning responsibility will be performed by the janitorial service for each office. In addition, disinfecting wipes will be available on each open desk should employees wish to further clean or disinfect their workspace at the start and end of each day as an added measure.

Common office areas will be cleaned by the janitorial service include (but are not limited to):

- Entrances
- Stairs
- Light switches
- Handrails
- Breakrooms
- Café/social hubs
- Ice machines
- Desks/workstations/private offices
- Tables
- Conference rooms
- Doors
- Restrooms
- Trash bins
- High-traffic office areas
- Cabinets
- Huddle rooms
- Enclaves
- Microwaves/other electrical appliances

Cleaning protocols after confirmed case

Upon learning of a new confirmed case, an enhanced cleaning protocol using Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved disinfectant will be performed. This practice is in accordance with the U.S. Centers of Disease Control & Prevention to help reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Implement physical distancing signage and plexiglass

Signs will be placed in areas where people may gather to help ensure that safe physical distancing (six feet or two meters) is maintained. This includes reception areas, copy rooms, social hubs and elevators.

Each reception desk will have plexiglass installed to limit contact.

Designed distancing measures in use of workstations

To keep a safe distance between workstations and employees, only workstations that ensure proper distancing will be available. For example, desks on the main isles will be off limits. Desks available for use and those not available for use will be clearly labeled.

Provide each office with a stock of personal protection supplies

Each location should provide disposable masks, individual hand-sanitizer gel, disinfecting wipes and hand-sanitizer stations.
Employee readiness

Emergency procedures

Every employee entering the office will be required to be familiar with all relevant emergency procedures. Employees should also have easy access to all company-specific emergency procedures. As with any medical emergency, if anyone in the building is suffering extreme symptoms related to COVID-19 that may require immediate attention, call an appropriate emergency response number in your area and provide all relevant information, including but not limited to:

- Company name, location and emergency contact phone number
- Nature of the emergency
- Name of the person requiring immediate attention

Suggested screening questions

It is recommended any employee returning to the workplace answer all the questions below, regardless of vaccination status.

1. In the last 48 hours, have you had a temperature of 100.4 or greater or any of the following symptoms of COVID-19: cough, shortness of breath, wheezing, shaking with chills, muscle or body aches (not related to physical exercise), sore throat, new loss of smell or taste or change in taste, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea or headache, new unexpected congestion or runny nose, or new unexpected fatigue?

2. Are you waiting for the results of a COVID-19 viral test due to symptoms or exposure?

3. Within the last 14 days, have you been told to quarantine or self-isolate by a health professional or governmental agency due to symptoms or exposure?

4. Is someone you live with waiting for the results of a COVID-19 viral test due to symptoms or exposure?

5. In the last 10 days, have you traveled internationally?

6. Within the last 14 days, have you had close contact with someone who has COVID-19, has COVID-19 symptoms or has had a positive COVID-19 viral test, or has had acute respiratory illness?
Personal protection supplies

Each open workspace, meeting area, social hub/break area and other common areas should have hand-sanitizing gel and disinfecting wipes in place.

Touchless hand-sanitizing stations should be set up at the reception desk, social hubs/break areas and outside restrooms.

Masks should be made available at the reception desk or designated area. If you need a mask when entering the workspace, please enter the space at the reception desk or designated area where the masks will be available.

Workspaces

To keep a safe distance between workstations, confirm which workstations are available for use. Desks in use and those not in use should be clearly labeled with the above signage on top of the workstation wall to assist in identifying which space is open and which is not.

Suggestions for break areas

- Require unvaccinated employees to wear masks and observe physical distancing when in break areas.
- Inform employees whether or not refrigerators, microwaves and coffee machines will be available for use.
- If microwaves are in use, require employees to clean the microwave handle before and after each use.
- Establish a “bring your own” coffee mug policy.
- Remove wooden/plastic utensils, paper plates and paper bowls from the social hubs/break areas. Employees should bring their own as needed.

Conclusion

As news regarding the coronavirus outbreak changes, recommendations may also evolve. As with vaccinations, booster protocols will need to be considered and reviewed to comply with local, state and federal guidelines. The guidance above should not be considered a definitive list of safety tips, but the suggestions can help reduce some risks at this uncertain time. It is vital all employers and employees keep up with developments in the pandemic and adjust guidance as needed.
The information in this template was compiled from sources believed to be reliable for informational purposes only. This template should serve as a guideline, which you can use to create your own guidelines, policies and procedures. We trust that you will customize these samples to reflect your own operations and believe that these samples may serve as a helpful platform for this endeavor. Any and all information contained herein is not intended to constitute advice (particularly not legal advice). Accordingly, persons requiring advice should consult independent advisors when developing guidelines, programs and policies. We do not guarantee the accuracy of this information or any results and further assume no liability in connection with this template, including any information, methods or safety suggestions contained herein. We undertake no obligation to publicly update or revise any of this information, whether to reflect new information, future developments, events or circumstances or otherwise. The subject matter of this publication is not tied to any specific insurance product nor will adopting these policies and procedures ensure coverage under any insurance policy.

©2021 The Zurich Services Corporation. All rights reserved.