



Innovative
BENEFIT PLANNING



Transition Back to the Workplace Guide

Table of Contents:

When to Reopen?3

Workplace Cleaning and Modifications
Prior to Opening.....4

 Cleaning.....4

 Physical Office Changes and Set up4

 Behavior Change/Training.....4

Transitioning Employees Back to Work5

 HR Strategy and Policy Review.....5

 Workforce Flexibility/Telecommuting5

 Ensuring a Healthy and Safe Environment.....6

 Temperature Checks6

 Maintain Confidentiality.....6

 Continued Workplace Safety6

Communication and Posting Requirements7

What We Can Take Away From COVID-19.....8

 Technology8

 Employee Resources.....8



We’ve Got You Covered!

Innovative Benefit Planning is here to walk alongside you during this time. We hope you find this guide helpful and a resource as you get back to full strength. We are here to support you and your employees in any way that we can.



Welcome Back

Many businesses and employees are looking forward to the return to “normal” and getting back to the office. But what does that new “normal” look like? As stay-at-home orders begin to lift, employers need to do their diligence and prepare for modified operations. Innovative Benefit Planning is here to support you during this time.

When to Reopen?

For starters, return to work plans will vary by local and state directives, industry, geography and nature of the workforce. Once the shelter-in-place orders are lifted, how should you decide when to reopen? The Center for Disease Control and Preventions provides guidance to assist employers on when to reopen workplaces during the COVID-19 Pandemic. It is important to check with your state and local health officials to determine the most appropriate actions. According to the CDC, you should consider reopening only if you can answer yes to all three of the following:

1. Is the workplace in a community no longer requiring significant mitigation?
2. Will reopening be in compliance with state and local orders?
3. Will you be ready to protect employees at higher risk for severe illness?

If you can answer yes to all three, the CDC recommends the following safety actions before opening:

- ✓ Promote healthy hygiene practices such as hand washing and wearing a cloth face covering
- ✓ Intensify cleaning, disinfection, and ventilation
- ✓ Ensure social distancing such as installing physical barriers, changing layout of workspaces, encouraging telework, closing communal spaces, staggering shifts and breaks, no large events
- ✓ Limit travel and modify commuting practices
- ✓ Train all staff on safety actions

Last, the CDC also recommends that you only reopen after you have implemented safeguards for the ongoing monitoring of employees, including:

- ✓ Check for signs and symptoms of employees
- ✓ Encourage employees who are sick to stay home
- ✓ Plan for when an employee gets sick
- ✓ Regularly communicate with local authorities and employees
- ✓ Monitor staff absences and have flexible leave policies and practices
- ✓ Be ready to close if there are increased cases

Workplace Cleaning and Modifications Prior to Opening

Cleaning

The CDC released guidance for cleaning and disinfecting workspaces that you should review when implementing your cleaning procedure. You should consider reviewing your existing cleaning procedures and consider enhancements for routine cleaning and disinfection, especially for common areas.

Physical Office Changes and Set up

In addition to cleaning, before employees return to the workplace, organizations should consider the following best practices for their physical office space:

- Increasing each employee's personal space and ensuring desks are 6 feet or more apart
- Installing plexiglass or other solid barriers where employees sit in close proximity
- Creating a walk-traffic flow that discourages congestion
- Updating air-filtration systems
- Installing automatic doors
- Installing no-touch soap dispensers and sinks in bathrooms
- Removing every other chair in break areas, conference rooms and lunchrooms
- Upgrade teleconference equipment to allow for more teleconferences
- Purchase/check sufficient stock of soap, sanitizer, paper towels, gloves, masks

In addition, you may wish to put up partitions between receptionists and others that may directly interact with visitors.

Behavior Change/Training

Developing, implementing, and training staff in the below safety-actions and demonstrating new safety measures for their protection will be key to the roll out of workplace safety.

- Developing healthy hygiene practices
- Establish social distancing rules
- Staggering working time as well as gathering/mealtimes
- Restricting use of any shared equipment and spaces
- Not allowing visitors (if necessary, keep a log)
- If possible, arrange for pick-up and drop-off delivery of packages to be handled outside
- Discourage hand shaking

As employees adjust to this new norm, it is important to check in with them as often as possible to ensure they are comfortable with their new work environment and the changes associated with returning to the workplace.



Transitioning Employees Back to Work

HR Strategy and Policy Review

Over the course of COVID-19, federal, state, and local governments have implemented COVID-19 specific legislation. A thorough analysis of existing policies should be undertaken to include adjustments made for these legislations. Some of the policies may include:

- Attendance
- Vacation/Paid Time Off
- Telecommuting
- Work hours, including start/stop time, breaks, lunch times, flexible hours, and staggered work hours
- ADA and accommodation requests
- Leave policies including sick leave
- Travel policies including business and personal travel
- Information technology and usage
- Develop policies and procedures for prompt identification and isolation of sick employees

- Communicable Disease policy
- Develop policies and procedures for a positive case response, who should be consulted, who is final decision-maker as well as a plan to inform those who were in contact with positive case(s)
- Consider adding a COVID-19 addendum to your employee handbook

Workforce flexibility/telecommuting

As stay-at-home orders begin to lift, employers may experience the need for continued flexibility due to high-risk employees, lack of childcare accommodations, and/or capacity and travel restrictions. Employers should consider:

- Staggered work hours or days
- Devise a plan for essential vs non-essential travel
- Be mindful of state to state travel laws/restrictions
- Awareness of safety standards at the destination/ location employee is traveling to
- Encouraging telework whenever possible and feasible with business operations



Ensuring a Healthy and Safe Environment

Many employers are considering options for monitoring employees for the presence of COVID-19 as they return to work. According to the EEOC, employers are permitted to measure an employee's temperature before they enter the workplace.

Temperature Checks

This may include daily temperature checks before entering the workplace. Use a real time no-contact forehead thermometer and immediately inform Employees if their temperature is above 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit in a private setting. If temperature is above 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, isolate the potentially infectious individuals to protect others at the worksite. You may ask Employee to return home and follow CDC guidelines.

Put precautions in place for those who are taking the temperatures of Employees. To protect the individual who is taking the temperature, you must first conduct an evaluation of reasonably anticipated safety and health hazards and assess the risk to which the individual may be exposed. Assume the testers are going to be exposed potentially to someone who is infected.

Based on anticipated exposure, determine measures that can be taken to protect the employee. Different types of devices can take temperature without exposure to bodily fluids, such as a cough or sneeze. Further, the tester could have a face shield in case someone sneezes or coughs (other recommendations include gowns and gloves).

You may require employees to wear protective gear (for example, masks and gloves). If you elect to do so, the cost of the protective gear should be paid for by the employer.

Note: Employers must ensure that any employee monitoring, screening, or testing is conducted in a non-discriminatory manner

with respect to protected categories such as age, national origin, pregnancy, and religion.

Note: If your company does business in the State of California (e.g., if you have one or more locations, Employees, customers, suppliers, etc. in the state), and your business is subject to the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA), then you must provide Employees a CCPA-compliant notice prior to or at the same time as temperature is taken.

Maintain Confidentiality

If medical results are logged, they must be stored separately from the Employee's personnel file. An employer may store all medical information related to COVID-19 in existing medical files. This includes an employee's statement that he/ she has the disease, suspects he/she has the disease, or the employer's notes or other documentation from questioning an employee about symptoms.

Continued Workplace Safety

Training all staff in the safety-actions rolled out on page 3 will be fundamental to your workplace safety strategy. On-going communication, training and posting reminders will be key to the continued success of your workplace safety.



Communication and Posting Requirements

As employees prepare to return to the office, naturally they are going to have questions and concerns. It is essential that communication regarding the company's steps and actions to reduce exposure, as well as the employee's expectations, should be communicated clearly and often. When you are honest and transparent in your communications, Employees will trust you are taking every step possible to ensure their safety. In return, they will be more likely to return to work and perform their jobs as required.

- Consider signage posted at all points of entry and key locations to effectively share and remind employees of the new requirements/processes
- Inform and encourage employees to self-monitor for signs and symptoms of COVID-19; if symptomatic, employees should stay home

- Post CDC hygiene protocols easily visible
- Poster for the Families First Coronavirus Response Act poster to remain posted
- Have policy/procedure and model notices on hand (**contact Innovative Benefit Planning for forms listed below**):
 - Guidance for Return to Work (RTW) Selection Process
 - Communications of a positive COVID-19 case within the workplace
 - "Authorized to Travel" letter
 - Template Work from Home Policy
 - Sample Employee Health Screen Log
 - Employee Acknowledgment of Safety Measures
 - Safe Work Environment checklist
 - Infection /Exposure checklist

Employers should also make sure that employees know how to file complaints, report concerns and request reasonable accommodations.





What We Can Take Away From COVID-19

While most employers had to react quickly to a remote environment and digital technology, collaboration and employee resources were put to the test, it has provided many of us the opportunity to learn new successes that we can carry on and adopt post COVID-19.

Technology

Your organization may have found new technology communications and meeting forums that proved successful. Continue to use these platforms as an efficient channel of communication.

Employee Resources

- Continue to encourage employees to utilize Telemedicine.

- Does your plan offer well-being programs? Consider it an opportune time to educate and implement a mental, health and physical well-being program.
- Lean on your Benefit Guardian, Nurse Advocate, Health Coach and Financial Well-Being Coach for support and to assist employees with their health care plans.
- Notify Employees of company “Employee Assistance Program”, if applicable.

The COVID-19 pandemic gives us all the opportunity to create a better and improved work environment through preventive best practices, improved virtual technology and truly learning the resilience of your team.

The CDC guidance and other public health guidance is updated periodically and may be revised to include further recommendations for employers, above and beyond those identified here.



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As laws and guidelines related to COVID-19 change, employers should consult with legal counsel when updating or changing policies.

As you navigate through reopening your office locations, you don't have to go at it alone, contact Innovative Benefit Planning for additional COVID-19 resources or assistance with the process.

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ibpllc.com | 101A Foster Rd, Moorestown, NJ 08057 | 888-427-7383