

How To Return To Work Safely In The COVID-19 Era





The COVID-19 pandemic has truly changed the world. Businesses in particular have been hit hard — whether it's being short staffed due to employees getting the virus, moving to a remote work environment or having to implement new protocols and processes to keep everyone safe.

As the virus continues to spread and evolve, many businesses (and their employees) are wondering when to go back to work after COVID. For those businesses who do choose to return to in-person work, there are many factors to consider as far as ensuring the workplace will be safe.

If your business is still struggling to find its footing in this COVID-19 era, don't worry! Below are some tips on how your business can protect its employees after asking them to return to in-person work:

Easy Ways To Curb The Spread Of The Virus

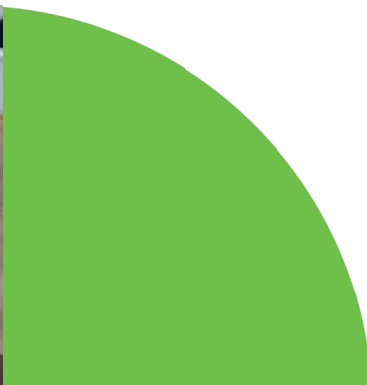
- Ensure workspaces are clean, hygienic and regularly wiped with disinfectant.
- Display promotional posters encouraging the habit of regular handwashing.
- Provide hand sanitizer and ensure it's displayed in an area that is accessible to all employees, contractors and customers.
- Promote good respiratory hygiene with posters making provision for face masks and paper tissues.
- Provide travel advice where necessary and encourage national travel advice consultation before people embark on any business trips.
- Reiterate the need to stay or work from home if any symptoms show or if exposed to the virus, while communicating that this time can be counted as sick leave.

Managing And Preventing COVID-19 Risks During Events Or Meetings

There are a number of steps you can take before, during and after large business meetings or events, to ensure safety.

Before The Event

- Check the latest recommendations from authorities and keep everyone in the loop on what's going on.
- Have a solid plan to prevent the spread of the virus at the event by noting where face-to-face interactions can be avoided and where the number of attendees could be scaled down and make sure to post this information where attendees can see it in advance.
- If it's a large meeting or event, consider requiring face masks and/or proof of vaccination.
- Ensure sufficient toiletries and materials for sanitation are pre-ordered and will be ready by the time of the event – this can include things such as hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and hand soap.
- Advise attendees to avoid the event or meeting if they happen to show any symptoms.
- Take contact tracing seriously and get the contact details of everyone in attendance, from the organizers to the visitors.
- Develop a response plan in case someone at the event suddenly becomes ill, which includes having an area of isolation, safely transferring them to a health facility and the details of the partner health provider.
- Let attendees have the event or meeting organizer's contact details, so they can call for advice or more information.



During The Event

- Provide a briefing on the measures the organizers are taking to make the event safe for all attendees.
- Build trust and practice ways of exchanging pleasantries without touching.
- Make good use of space and arrange seats so that attendees are one meter away from each other.
- Ensure the area is well ventilated by opening the windows and doors where possible.
- Record and retain all participants' names and contact information for at least one month. This is for contact tracing and will help public health authorities trace people who may have been exposed to COVID-19 if one or more participants become ill right after the event.

After The Event — If An Attendee Reports Having COVID-19

If an attendee reports that they have COVID-19 and may have been contagious during the meeting or event, you need to let all participants know. As advised and expected, they should monitor themselves for symptoms for the number of days recommended by U.S. experts.

What You Need To Consider During Business Travel



- Before embarking on a trip, ensure your business has the latest information on areas where COVID-19 is spreading and communicate this information to the employees who will be traveling.
- After getting the most up-to-date information, your business will need to evaluate the benefits and risks related to upcoming or future travel plans.
- Avoid sending employees at higher risk of serious illness (for instance, older employees and those with medical conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease) to areas where COVID-19 is spreading. It'll also be best to postpone any trips that are not crucial or, better still, make any meetings virtual.
- Provide employees who are about to travel with small bottles (under 100 CL due to airline protocol) of alcohol-based sanitizers and advise regular hand washing, mask-wearing and any other preventative measures you feel should be followed.
- On returning from a trip, the next thing is not to rush right into returning to the office. Employees who have returned from an area where COVID-19 is spreading rapidly should monitor themselves in case of any symptoms.

Preparing Your Business In Case COVID-19 Hits Your Workforce

- Be prepared to shift your workplace from in-person to remote if needed.
- Create a contingency plan for the business which should address how to keep your business running even if a significant number of employees cannot come physically to the office either due to local restrictions on travel or because they are ill and exhibiting symptoms.
- Once you're ready to return to the office, make sure to clearly outline safety guidelines and communicate those to all returning employees.
- If participants develop even a mild cough or low-grade fever (i.e., a temperature of 37.3 C or more), they should stay at home and self-isolate. This means avoiding close contact (1 meter or nearer) with other people, including family members. They should also call their healthcare provider or the local public health department, giving them details of their recent travel and the symptoms they're exhibiting.

As critical as the return-to-work plan is, it's not the only aspect you will need to note. Be sure to address the mental health and social consequences of any COVID-19 cases, to keep spirits up during difficult times.

How EmPower HR Can Help?

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