

# RETURNING WORKFORCES

*and Covid-19 Vaccines*



# Contents



## **CHAPTER 1** **6**

---

Return-to-Work at a Glance

## **CHAPTER 2** **11**

---

COVID-19 Vaccine Overview

## **CHAPTER 3** **15**

---

COVID-19 Vaccines and the Workplace

## **CHAPTER 4** **20**

---

Workplace Responsibility

## **CHAPTER 5** **23**

---

Legal Considerations

**CHAPTER 6** **31**

---

Sample Policies

**CHAPTER 7**  **37**

---

Sample Letters

**CHAPTER 8** **41**

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Checklists



## Introduction

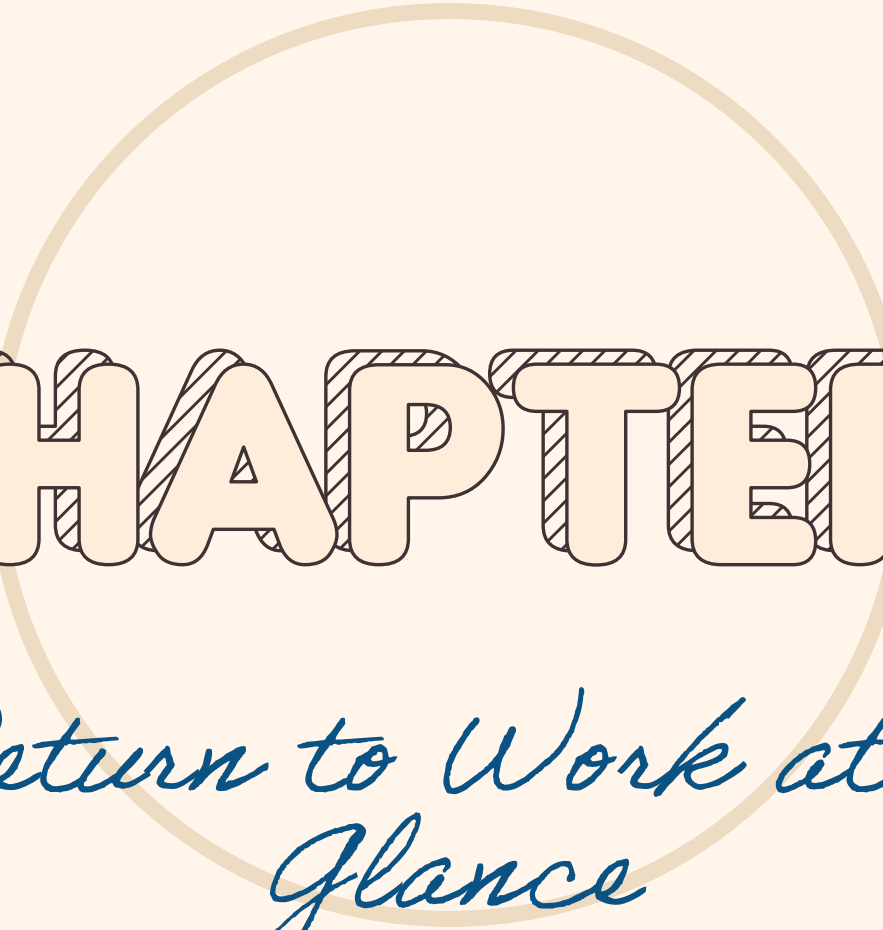
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The COVID-19 pandemic has been raging for months. In that time, many businesses have ceased operations out of safety concerns and have waited for the right opportunity to resume. Now, with COVID-19 vaccines becoming available, employers can finally start planning for their immediate futures.

There are still many unknowns related to the COVID-19 vaccines, but there is at least one agreed-upon factor: Vaccinating employees is the best way to re-open a business safely. However, while it may be the best tool in the arsenal, it is not the only one. Employers will still need to continue using safeguards such as masks and social distancing to ensure the safety of their workers and customers.

With that in mind, this toolkit explores the COVID-19 vaccines and other workplace safeguards, and helps employers decide whether a vaccination policy is right for their organizations. Included at the end is a robust appendix with printable resources that employers can use right now, including policies, communications and more.

As always, Filice Insurance will be here to answer any questions related to this toolkit and other workplace matters.



# CHAPTER 1

*Return to Work at a  
Glance*

# CHAPTER 1

## Return-to-Work at a Glance

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There are many benefits of return-to-work plans for both employers and employees. Employers can enjoy increased employee engagement, proactive cost containment, reduced turnover, increased communication and improved morale with an established return-to-work plan. And it's been proven that employees who go through return-to-work plans are able to get back to work quicker than those who don't, meaning that employers will see increased productivity following an employee's return to work.

Employees also benefit from return-to-work plans, as they feel supported by their employer, which increases their engagement and loyalty to the company. Utilizing a return-to-work plan also helps them get back to work faster and increases the likelihood that they feel secure and stable in their role.

The benefits of return-to-work plans are undeniable. While these plans are typically customized on an individual basis, employers can use the basics of a return-to-work plan to build their company's methodology for getting employees to return to work following the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **COVID-19 Return-to-Work Plans**

COVID-19 has caused many businesses to shut down or transition their employees to work from home, disrupting daily work life for many. As stay-at-home regulations are scaled back and all businesses are allowed to resume as normal, employees will be asked to come back to work. While they may not be coming back from an injury or leave, employers still need to have a plan in place for all employees to safely and successfully return to work. This will be true even after employees are vaccinated against COVID-19, as return-to-work plans will still need to include safeguards such as social distancing and mask-wearing, even if some or all of a workforce is vaccinated.

While employers may need to tailor their COVID-19 return-to-work plans to employees' specific needs (e.g., child care arrangements, caregiving responsibilities and health issues), having a generalized plan in place can help them safely reopen their businesses.

Employers' COVID-19 return-to-work plans should consider the following:

**1. Anticipated return-to-work date**—With the uncertainty that COVID-19 has brought, it's important to give clear information and dates when employees are to return to work whenever possible. Employers should ensure they are flexible with dates, since state and federal guidance can quickly change.

**2. Disinfecting and cleaning measures**—Because COVID-19 can remain on surfaces long after they've been touched, it's important that a business frequently cleans and disinfects its facility. Some best practices include:

- Cleaning and disinfecting all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, keyboards, telephones, handrails and doorknobs.
- Discouraging workers from using other workers' phones, desks, offices, or other tools and equipment, when possible. If necessary, clean and disinfect them before and after use.
- Providing disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces can be wiped down by employees before each use.

**3. Social distancing protocol**—Social distancing is the practice of deliberately increasing the physical space between people to avoid spreading illness. In terms of COVID-19, social distancing best practices for businesses can include:

- Avoiding gatherings of 10 or more people
- Instructing workers to maintain at least 6 feet of distance from other people
- Hosting meetings virtually when possible
- Limiting the number of people on the job site to essential personnel only
- Discouraging people from shaking hands

**4. Employee screening procedures**—To keep employees safe, employers should consider conducting screening procedures to identify potentially ill employees before they enter the office. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) permits employers to measure employees' body temperatures before allowing them to enter the worksite. Any employee screening should be implemented on a nondiscriminatory basis, and all information gleaned should be treated as confidential medical information under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)—specifically, the identity of workers exhibiting a fever or other COVID-19 symptoms should only be shared with members of company management with a true need to know. Employers should also notify employees that they will be screening them, to avoid any surprises.

**5. Employee safety training**—An employer’s return-to-work plan should include detailed safety training guidance to ensure that all employees understand how they can prevent the spread of COVID-19. A plan should discuss the following safety training topics:

- Respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene—Businesses should encourage good hygiene to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This can involve:
  - ◆ Providing tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles
  - ◆ Providing soap and water in the workplace
  - ◆ Placing hand sanitizers in multiple locations to encourage hand hygiene
  - ◆ Reminding employees to not touch their eyes, nose or mouth
- Personal protective equipment (PPE)—PPE is equipment worn by individuals to reduce exposure to a hazard, in this case, COVID-19. Businesses should focus on training workers on proper PPE best practices. Employees should understand how to properly put on, take off and care for PPE. Training material should be easy to understand and must be available in the appropriate language and literacy level for all workers.
- Staying home when sick—Employers should encourage employees to err on the side of caution if they’re not feeling well and stay home when they’re sick or are exhibiting common symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g., fever, cough or shortness of breath).

**5. Mental health considerations**—The COVID-19 pandemic has increased stress levels of employees across the country. It’s important that employers’ return-to-work plans include guidance for managing employee mental health concerns when employees return to work.

**6. Process for individualized requests**—An employer’s return-to-work plan should include information about how employees can go about making individualized requests for changes to the plan. Some employees may have underlying health conditions that put them at greater risk of severe illness with COVID-19, meaning they may not be able to fully return to work. Others may be facing unique child care arrangements due to schools and day cares being closed. Employers should be flexible and compassionate in their responses to individualized requests.

Any return-to-work plan should be tailored to the business’s unique needs and should follow local and state regulations.



## Other Return-to-Work Considerations

Returning to work after the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to bring challenges to any organization. Some of the most common challenges that should be prepared for include the following:

- Changing worker priorities – If an organization asked its employees to work from home during the COVID-19 Pandemic, employees may want to still enjoy work-from-home arrangements even after the office is reopened. Employers should be prepared for an increased demand in work-from-home requests, and may need to expand their pre-COVID-19 policies to meet this demand.
- Updating the office layout – Due to social distancing protocols, organizations may need to reconfigure office layouts. Per official guidelines, employee workstations should be 6 feet apart to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Adapting to changing rules and regulations – Due to the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, rules and regulations are constantly changing. Employers should be prepared to change their business practices if needed to maintain critical operations. This could involve identifying alternative suppliers, prioritizing existing customers or suspending portions of their operations.

Remember, reopening a business after the COVID-19 pandemic isn't as simple as opening the doors. Employers will need to carefully evaluate each step of the reopening and gradually ask employees to return to work.

