

Returning to Work After COVID-19: Until we have a vaccine...



Until a vaccine is developed, COVID-19 will continue to persist in our midst. From staff schedules to sanitary processes, employers must be uniquely ready, while also retaining the flexibility that such an unprecedented disaster requires. The health of both employees and customers/clients should be at the forefront of any action an Employer takes as it reopens. Below are a **few best practices**:

Be proactive, instead of reactive. Employers can be proactive by creating and carrying out general COVID-19 policies. Use technology where and when you can to have meetings. Increase the frequency with which shared spaces are cleaned and sanitized, and should prohibit the use of some areas (breakrooms) altogether. Hand sanitizer should be plentiful, and soap in bathrooms should be stocked and full. If in-person meetings cannot be avoided, employees should sit at least one chair apart from each other around a table. Employers should also consider enacting official policies including: frequent hand washing; the wearing of PPE (masks and gloves); social distancing; limiting travel; etc. Employers can strengthen the effectiveness of these measures by posting signs and having employees sign copies of the policies acknowledging that they have read and understood them. Lastly, client-facing businesses should consider limiting in-person attendance of clients on the premises. Clients will understand if a meeting is moved to a virtual setting, and may even prefer it.

Communicate, communicate, communicate If you plan to enact uniform workplace policies upon your reopening, they need to be shared and well-published to your entire workforce so all are made aware of new practices and can comply. Equally important, let your clients and customers know about any revised hours, and whether visits may be made by appointment-only. Communication is also a two-way street. Encourage employees to communicate with your HR Department or their managers if they aren't feeling well, or have other concerns about returning to work. Have managers check-in regularly with their employees on any possible symptoms they may be feeling.

Be Aware of the Fluid Nature of the Virus

The bottom line is that COVID-19 is an unprecedented situation and will continue to require creative solutions. The reopening process does not mean that we have re-entered "normalcy" once again. The status of the pandemic remains fluid, and re-closures could be possible if outbreaks reoccur. Employers should have contingency plans for additional closures or restrictions, which may include additional furloughs, work-at-home arrangements, etc. Throughout the remainder of 2020 and beyond, managers and HR personnel should keep abreast of updates from federal, state, and local governments, as well as guidelines from the CDC, the WHO, and state health departments. Throughout this process, good communication with employees will remain critically important.

This is not an easy time for any of us. If you feel anxious about returning to work or about COVID-19, call a Best Care EAP counselor. **All sessions with a BCEAP counselor are FREE and CONFIDENTIAL. The COVID counseling help line is available 24/7, call (800) 801-4182.**