

# 5 Employer Considerations to Return to Worksite

## 1 Confirm Your Region Is Ready

Refer to appropriate guidelines from sources such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC<sup>1</sup>), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA<sup>2</sup>), and your State and County Health Department websites for details for specifics about business closures/openings as well as population and person level data should confirm flattening curves. **Consider the following when determining if your region is ready:**

- Key indicators of regional stability will include, but are not limited to, a continued average decrease in new cases, testing and contact tracing capacity, and hospital capacity.<sup>3</sup>
- Creating a committee to apply these guidelines and how they apply by location incorporating changes as they occur.

Refer to the “State COVID-19 Information and Links” document in the UnitedHealthcare broker or customer portals which consolidates COVID-19 statistics and government links by state.

## 2 Prepare for Worksite Return

**Determine whether or not to establish policies, including virus testing, high-risk protocol, worksite spacing, cleaning and hygiene, physical distancing expectations (meeting rooms and common areas), travel and transportation.**

**Consider the following in decisions:**

- The makeup of your population and industry to create workplace policies that will be effective for your situation.
- Individuals designated as responsible contacts for overseeing and ensuring implementation of your plan.
- How many employees each worksite can handle to maintain optimal physical distancing.
- Whether or not to establish a virus testing policy based on testing evidence and availability of tests prior to start of work and if taking a temperature should be considered.
- Whether or not a policy for facemasks is needed.
- Whether or not changes are required in the worksite footprint. Evaluate how to assess positions that need to come back into the office and are there positions that can remain at home.
- If employees should be phased back to work and the basis of the phasing.
- Review spacing meal schedules.

### Important Notice:

The content contained herein only provides general information on return to worksite considerations. This information does not constitute medical, legal or human resources advice and is not intended nor should it be used as a return to worksite plan. Such a plan needs to be developed by you with your professional advisers taking into account, among other things, the unique aspects of your work environment, geography, employee population and applicable state and local return to worksite guidelines.

The COVID-19 virus is new and information concerning how to test for it, its symptoms, how it spreads and how it can be best contained is constantly evolving as more is learned about the nature of the virus. Additionally, the COVID-19 virus is known to be spread by asymptomatic individuals. As such, no return to worksite plan can fully prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus within the workplace. Any return to worksite plan must be constantly monitored and modified to take into account the most recent information concerning the virus.

## 2 Prepare for Worksite Return (continued)

- The impact of school closures and day care availability in your regions.
- Guidelines for which an employee can request a work accommodation (e.g., long-term work from home), including employees with high risk conditions and under what conditions. Also include guidelines for when a symptomatic employee must stay at home.
- Response to a report of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 at the worksite.
- CDC based protocol for screening employees and visitors including decisions on whether or not to ask if they have experienced symptoms since their last time at the workplace and/or excluding anyone from the workplace that has experienced symptoms. Determine whether or not to recommend medical follow up for that person and anyone else that may have been in contact with them. Recognize that someone in contact with a symptomatic person may be asymptomatic and therefore pre-symptomatic.
- Policies to smoking areas and whether or not a change is required for a more restrictive smoking policy.
- The size of in-person gatherings.
- Setting a maximum number of employees and members of the public on company premises and in specific areas.
- Business travel restrictions policy for employees.
- If work vehicles and/or company transportation is provided, consider physical distancing in multi-passenger vehicles; avoid shared transportation (when possible) and disinfect shared vehicles between drivers.
- Consult with your legal, real-estate, occupational health and other resources.
- Think about all of the additional issues that might be relevant to your worksite.
- Create a communication plan for employees which explains what to expect, what will change, when they should work from home, etc. Consider listing employee support services.
- Employee education on workplace safety and additional training for management so they understand their responsibility for enforcing these policies. Establish guidelines for limiting in-person interactions and physical contact.
- Check with your local chamber of commerce, industry or trade association groups to see if any additional recommended practices are available.
- Mechanisms to track compliance and communicate with employees regarding protocols.

### Prepare buildings or worksites

- Prepare the physical workspace: clean, stock with hand sanitizer, alcohol wipes, soap and masks/gloves (if appropriate). Evaluate placement of sanitizer stations.
- Establish frequent and thorough cleaning protocols. Ensure that cleaning services adequately and regularly disinfects all workspaces, and ensure that you have access to support services trained in decontamination in the case of a possible, plausible or known contamination.
- Physically distance (at least 6 feet) of desk/work areas. Continue to check CDC guidelines for physical distancing and transmission guidelines.
- Modify open floor plans by adding partitions.
- Close/modify common areas.
- Minimize touchpoints, where possible.
- Display signs reminding customers/employees (to maintain physical distancing, wash hands frequently, avoid touching face, stay home when sick, etc.).
- Consider whether any workplace entry restrictions for employees and visitors are appropriate.

### 3 Prepare Employees Prior to Return

- Communicate often with employees. Outline your commitment to safety, health, education and training. Communicate basic reminders e.g., physical distancing, washing hands often, wearing gloves/masks if appropriate for business, etc.
- Share local and community resources available to employees.
- Offer clear guidelines for when employees MUST stay at home.
- Encourage employees to use the free CDC symptom checker or the COVID-19 symptom checker on [uhc.com](https://www.uhc.com) to understand what they should do if or when they are experiencing symptoms of illness.<sup>4</sup>
- Encourage employees to get in the habit of daily symptom checking, so that it becomes a habit by the time they return to the worksite. Employees should consult their medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning.

### 4 Begin Return to Worksite Process

**Allow people who identify themselves as high-risk to work from home. (Employees are not required to disclose what makes them high-risk, only that they are high-risk.)**

- Based on current available information and clinical expertise, adults over 65 and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions might be at risk for severe illness from COVID-19. Such underlying medical conditions include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - Chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma.
  - Serious heart conditions.
  - Conditions causing a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment.
  - Smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled.
  - HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications.
  - Severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher).
  - Diabetes.
  - Chronic kidney disease.
  - Liver disease.

Please see the CDC website for updates to the list of medical conditions.

**Think about staggering the timing of employees' return to worksite and consider pilots based on your workplace criteria:**

- **Seniority-based return to work:** Consider having designated leaders return to work 2 weeks prior to other employees to test policies and ensure environment is safe for others to return.
- **Critical function return to work:** Select roles or individuals deemed most important to return to work first to accelerate operations and better prepare for a larger re-integration. Similar to above, test policies and procedures and adjust accordingly.
- **Hybrid approach to seniority-based plus critical function:** Similar to above, test policies and procedures and adjust accordingly.

**Consider providing training on safe work practices. Content could include the following:**

- **Physical distancing protocols.**
- **Hand hygiene:** Studies show that adequate handwashing (20 seconds with soap) and use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer, for when soap and water is not available, are key measures for stopping the community spread of infection.<sup>5</sup>
- **Respiratory hygiene:** In addition to typical guidance for respiratory hygiene (cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, use tissues and throw them away, wash your hands or use a hand sanitizer every time you touch your mouth or nose), the CDC now recommends that all people wear cloth face coverings whenever they leave their homes (universal masking).<sup>6</sup>

## 5 Once Back at Worksite

### **Employees with symptoms of COVID-19 MUST stay at home and get tested.**

- Frequently refer to the CDC website<sup>3</sup> for a current list of symptoms and guidelines. This is an evolving area and the symptom list and guidelines continues to change. At present, the CDC has recommended the following:
  - At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since recovery (defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g. cough, shortness of breath); and at least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
  - If the employee is able to work from home, they should do so for at least 14 days from the onset of their symptoms.

### **Continue communicating prevention and safety reminders. Conduct audits for building sanitation and distancing practices.**

### **Continued monitoring of employees is critical.**

### **If a worksite outbreak occurs, have a plan in place to support employees, tighten restrictions and step back employee re-integration:**

- Identify and assess the source and magnitude of the exposure.
- Quickly quarantine those exposed.
- Communicate to those at risk.
- Assess the need for additional site cleaning, employee communications and/or modifications to the workspace.
- Consider changing the workforce strategy, such as adjusting seating arrangements, use of common spaces or shifting employees back home. Contact your state or county health department if outbreak at work occurs.

### **Consider how your policy should change as technological advances such as treatment or a vaccine becomes widely available.**



**Contact your UnitedHealthcare representative for additional information.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html>

<sup>2</sup> [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/national-coronavirus-response-a-road-map-to-reopening/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

<sup>5,6</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>