

The New Normal.

Return to Work Tip Sheet

Overview

The global impact of the coronavirus pandemic presents unique challenges to employers and their staff. Johns Hopkins, which has been at the forefront of the global response to the virus with experts in public health, infectious disease, and emergency preparedness, partnered with Smith & Company, a leading global strategic advisory firm, to provide an in-depth briefing to executives from some of the world's most established and influential companies. The briefing provided executives an opportunity to hear directly from those at the center of the crisis and ask important questions pertinent to their organizations.

We understand the challenges business leaders face in protecting their businesses and staff during these exceptional times, and both Johns Hopkins and Smith & Company have resources available to help organizations navigate this unprecedented situation. Johns Hopkins and Smith & Company collaborated to prepare the following high level “tip sheet” to provide some initial guidance on reopening the workplace.

Roadmap for Reopening

Our return to work and other daily activities will be a “dimmer switch” rather than a flip of the light switch approach, meaning we will ideally open certain non-essential businesses first and send the workforce back in stages, as opposed to all at once to reduce the risk of sharp increases in COVID-19 cases that could overwhelm our healthcare system.

While we are still in the first phase aimed at keeping people at home to reduce transmission of the virus, it is important for leaders to begin to think about the measures they will need to put in place and adjustments they will need to make to their operations when we move to the next phase, when social distancing guidelines will be eased. Importantly, it is critical for all employers to comply with their state and local mandates. Johns Hopkins recently released [Public Health Principles for a Phased Reopening During COVID-19: Guidance for Governors](#), which includes communications considerations, risk assessment for organizations in specific settings, and other helpful indicators. These guidelines also serve as a helpful tool for employers.

The Top 10 Considerations for Going Back to Work with a “New Normal”



Keep those who can work from home at home.



Update the dress code and note that protective gear is now in vogue.

Clearly employees who come into contact with many other employees and / or customers should consider masks, gloves, and even protective eyewear, depending on their role and potential exposure. But now even the office employee shouldn't consider their work attire complete without a cloth mask, at a minimum, to protect their fellow colleagues.



Get creative with employee schedules for those who need to go in.

You will need to think outside of the traditional 9am-5pm office hours so that you have employees work in waves, rather than all at once, to limit the number of people in the workplace at a time.



Reconfigure seating arrangements to conform to social distancing guidelines.

The open floor plan may be out of style for good, or at least for some time. Distance and some barriers, such as those provided by cubical walls, should be considered where possible.



Use your videoconference account now that you have one.

Your employees, clients, and business partners have all become accustomed to this format. Consider limiting business travel strictly to trips that are absolutely business critical and cannot be done virtually. This will limit your employees' exposure to the virus, and reduce issues your employees may face based on travel restrictions being imposed by various regions and governments.



Embrace and enforce sick company policy.

Make sure your policy and culture reinforce that it is not professional or socially acceptable to come to work sick. Paid sick leave promotes health.



Think twice about how you greet your colleagues, clients, and partners.

It will likely be some time before the hug or handshake is socially acceptable.



Leave the tracking and monitoring of illness to the proper public health authorities because they have the proper training and expertise.



Invest in measures to ensure the workplace remains sanitary.

This could involve occasional deep cleaning services, adding hand sanitizer stations, encouraging frequent handwashing, and instructing employees to wipe down their workspaces and surfaces on a daily basis.



Do encourage your employees to self-report any COVID-19 symptoms to the proper public health authorities.