

Casting a Wide Net

Issues employers need to consider as the country opens

Introduction

Below is a broad list of questions that owners, employers, and managers need to consider as we re-open offices, production facilities, and jobsites. This list is not all-inclusive; some questions may not apply to your business or your facility. We decided to present this information in the form of questions for two reasons. **First**, the guidance and safety rules on how to prevent the spread of the coronavirus are evolving and changing quickly. Rules can also differ depending on what state, county, or city you're working in. **Second**, by presenting you with questions, we're hoping to prompt deeper thoughts about the issues and how they affect you, your employees, and the specific area, site, building, or facility you're responsible for.

Ultimately, the answers to these questions will come from a variety of sources. You'll likely need to customize the answers for specific offices, sites, areas, and operations. Here are some good sources to help formulate answers that will help you, your people, and your company:

- [CDC: www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- [OSHA: www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)
- [NIOSH: www.cdc.gov/niosh/](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/)
- You can find your state's [Health Departments](http://www.cdc.gov/publichealthgateway/healthdirectories/healthdepartments.html) here: www.cdc.gov/publichealthgateway/healthdirectories/healthdepartments.html

You have a lot to consider. We hope this helps.

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Please note that some of the questions below may appear in more than one section.

Mental and Physical Health

People have very different reactions to the pandemic ranging from paralyzing fear to complete lack of concern. Their reactions depend on their health, the health of loved ones, life experiences, financial situation, etc. Their reactions affect how you will communicate with them and how you will manage safety. Have you considered the mental state of your employees?

- Are all of your employees willing to return to work, or are some too scared to come back?
- Will you have enough staff to manage critical functions?
- Do your supervisors intentionally gauge the mental state of employees?
- Will you discuss mental health and even suicide prevention with your employees?

How will you ensure that employees aren't distracted by fear, worry, anxiety, etc.? These emotions are extremely powerful. Here are some of the concerns your employees might have:

- Is it safe to go back to work?
- Am I going to get sick with COVID-19 if I go back to work?
- Who's going to take care of the kids if I go back to work?
- And if I do get sick:
 1. Am I insured? Is COVID-19 covered by my health insurance?
 2. Will I infect my family?
 3. Will I get workers' comp if I'm out of work because of COVID-19?
- What if someone else in the office gets sick, how will I know if I'm infected?
- Is the handle on the bathroom door clean?
- Is it safe to eat lunch in the break room?
- Is it safe to eat at my desk or workstation?
- Who touched this desk, table saw, lathe, telephone, computer, etc., before me?

Your employees will have questions for you. They may want to know:

- Is it safe to come back to work?
- Will my job be here if I have to stay home to take care of a sick family member?
- Will my job be here if I wait to come back until I feel safer?
- Who should I call if I feel sick or can't come in? Do I need a doctor's note?
- What symptoms should I watch for?

If an employee tests positive for COVID-19:

- Will you need a plan or policy for notifying some or all of your employees?
- Do you need to check with your attorney or corporate office to find out what you can and can't say about an employee who tested positive to make sure that you don't violate company policies or HIPAA rules?
- Will employees who worked in close proximity to the sick employee have to self-quarantine?
- What is the impact on operations if several or all employees have to self-quarantine?
- Do you need a return-to-work policy for employees who have been diagnosed with COVID-19? This plan could include steps outlined by the CDC.

Personnel and Human Resources

In small companies, the HR person might be you. Here are some questions to consider.

- Do you need a Coronavirus Point Person whose primary responsibility is to understand and coordinate the company's actions?
- Have you assigned someone to keep up with local, state, federal, and corporate guidance on how you open the jobsite and conduct business?
- Do you need to conduct special or new training that describes precautions, symptoms of COVID-19, and/or your company's (new) procedures and policies?
- What kind of training does your state, county, city, etc., require on coronavirus and COVID-19 for employees who return to work?

Do you need to update policies or add new ones? Consider the following:

- Attendance
- Sick leave
- Personal days
- Discipline
- Masks or other PPE related to coronavirus
- How to deal with the public, customers, and visitors
- Return to work after having COVID-19
- Cleaning and disinfecting

Communication

What's your plan for communicating with your employees?

Fear of the unknown is a key driver of anxiety. Neither fear nor anxiety make for better employees or better business. Giving your employees good, actionable information that they can understand, and use will help them stay calm and be more productive. Calm employees are better for business and better for the community. When you explain what the company is doing and why it's doing it, you are going a long way toward helping everyone stay calm and be happy and productive.

What, exactly, do you want to tell your people and how often will you remind them?

- How often will health checks be done?
- Will health checks be done in-person, by telephone, or on an app?
- What happens if they fail a health check?
- Do they get any pay if they can't work because they failed a health check?
- How long do they have to stay away from work?
- What kind of health questions are you going to ask, and why the answers are important?
- Are there new arrival times or schedule changes?
- Are there new or specific traffic patterns in the building, like one-way aisles or halls?
- Will there be rules about how many people can be in a room?
- Are masks required in the building or on the jobsite?
- When and where do masks have to be worn?
- Are there any places where they don't have to be worn?
- What should employees do if they forget their mask?
- Who should they call if they feel sick or can't come in?
- Do they need a doctor's note?
- What symptoms should they watch for?
- Is there any financial support for employees who get sick?
- How do they get information about that support?
- What do they do if someone in their family or household gets sick?

Do you need special or additional signage that describes requirements for:

- social distancing?
- masks or face coverings?
- health checks before entering the building or the site?
- how to enter the building or site?
- how to register or check in as a visitor or guest?

Will you have regular meetings with your staff to explain what you're doing and what is changing? If the office or shop has to close again, how will you notify employees?

Explaining the plan or policy once may meet a regulatory requirement, but it will be of limited value to your workforce. You'll have to explain the plan more than once to your employees, especially as requirements change.

Health Checks and Contact Tracing

Your local Health Department should have current information on health checks and contact tracing.

- Will you need to keep more detailed logs of visitors and clients, including delivery persons, to support possible contact tracing?
- Will you need to do health checks on, or take the temperatures of, employees, clients, guests, visitors, etc.?
- What questions are you going to ask, and why are the answers important?
- What, if any, information from the health check will be recorded and documented?
- Do you need to check with your attorney or corporate office before writing down or reporting information that could be considered protected health information under HIPAA?
- How often will health checks be done? Before entering the site or building? During the shift?
- Will health checks be done in-person, by telephone, or on an app?
- Who will perform the health checks?
- Do you have employees who are trained to ask the correct questions and respond correctly and in a fashion that represents your company and your brand?

If someone fails a health check or has a fever or cough:

- Will they be sent home? If so, for how long?
- Will they get any pay?
- What action is taken?
- What information is or is not recorded?
- Who receives the information?
- Where are the records kept?
- Is there a government or corporate reporting requirement?

Hand Washing

Thorough hand washing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of many viruses.

- How will you handle hand hygiene?
- Do you have adequate handwashing stations?
- Do you have a reliable source for supplies (towels, soap, sanitizer, etc.)?
- Who will be responsible for checking that there is sufficient soap, towels, sanitizer, etc.?
- Will you put hand sanitizer in new locations? If you do, make sure the containers are safe and secure, so they don't create new hazards, like fire or a bottle of sanitizer falling into a machine.

Social Distancing and Physical Distancing

It's a good idea to practice physical distancing even if you aren't symptomatic.

Do you have jobs, duties, or tasks that will require employees to be in close proximity to one another (generally, closer than 6 feet)?

- If you can't eliminate the close work, can you reduce the amount of time or the number of people working close to one another?
- Can you adjust schedules so there are fewer people in the same place at the same time?
- Can you install partitions between these employees, for instance, between workstations on a line, or between people working at a large table?
- Can parts of the work be done in separate areas?

How will physical distancing work in common areas?

- Are there areas where employees typically line up and/or wait, like time clocks, elevators, vending machines, restrooms, break rooms, etc.?
- Can you eliminate the lines?
- Can you stagger shifts, breaks, arrival times, etc.?
- Can you specify and enforce specific times for breaks and lunches?
- Can you use floor markings to encourage and enforce 6 feet of separation in lines?
- Is there enough physical space for a long line of people who are 6 feet apart?

Masks and PPE

Depending on your business and the work you do, your employees may be required to wear masks or PPE

- Are you requiring employees to wear masks or other coronavirus-related PPE?
- Are you requiring the public, customers, and visitors to wear masks?
- What type of mask will need to be worn?
- When and where do masks need to be worn?
- Will masks be supplied by the employees or by the company?
- Will the masks be disposable or reusable?
- If they're reusable, how will they be cleaned?
- How often do employees need to change their masks? Under what circumstances?
- What will you do if someone refuses to wear a mask or refuses to wear it properly?
- Do you have a plan for safely and effectively collecting and disposing of potentially large volumes of masks, gloves, paper towels, sanitizing wipes, etc.?
- Do the people disposing of this waste need training or PPE to handle the waste safely?
- Do local regulations allow disposal of masks as regular garbage?

Sanitizing Shared Tools and Common Areas

If you have tools, worktables, equipment, machines, or vehicles that are shared between employees, you need a plan.

- What's the plan for cleaning and sanitizing shared items between users?
- Who will be responsible for cleaning and sanitizing shared items?
- Have those people been trained on what to clean, what cleaners/sanitizers to use, and what PPE is needed during the cleaning/sanitizing?
- Where are the supplies, like PPE and sanitizer, located and how will they be reordered?
- How long will the tools, equipment, etc., be out of service because of cleaning and sanitizing?
- Will you need to purchase additional items or adjust work schedules to accommodate these delays?

- Do you have customer-facing areas?
- Will they have to be disinfected frequently?
- Who will be responsible for cleaning these areas?
- How often will common areas be cleaned?
- Should you make the cleaning obvious, so your customers know that you're making that effort?

Make sure that the cleaners and sanitizers can be used safely. Some of these chemicals can damage materials and finishes. Some are flammable and toxic.

Systems and Operations

Questions to ask before re-starting systems and equipment that have been shut down for an extended period of time.

- Are there “cold” start-up procedures that need to be followed that are not typically necessary?
- Do machines or equipment need maintenance or inspections before restarting?
- Do you need to have the manufacturer inspect or test any machines or equipment?
- Do water fountains, drink coolers, water coolers, coffee machines, etc., need to be cleaned, flushed, or disinfected?
- Are there vending machines that need to be emptied, cleaned, and restocked (think about spoilage and expiration dates), or even reconditioned by the vendor?

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