Preparing for Workplace Re-Entry During COVID-19 (Updated 3/1/2021)

As state, local, and municipal governments take steps to re-open businesses across the country, employers must take a fresh look at their physical workspace, their workplace practices, and their communication and training of employees in order to prohibit the spread of the coronavirus and to protect their employees and clients to keep them safe.

Below is a checklist for employers to consider when planning to reopen, or for those businesses who have remained open under an "essential business" classification. This checklist serves to provide some ideas, resources, and reminders on how to improve the level of safety and protection in your workplace.

A few things to highlight:
- If employees can work from home, allow them to continue to telecommute as social distancing and safe hygiene are still the only way to prohibit the spread of the disease.
- Social distancing, use of PPE, proper disinfecting, and proper training are the keys to maintaining a safe workplace.
- Experts' understanding of COVID-19 is quickly evolving. From the symptoms of COVID-19 and the CDC's recommendations to government orders on social distancing, PPE use, and workplace closures – information is constantly being updated. Employers should identify all of the resources necessary on the federal (DOL, CDC, EPA, OSHA, EEOC), state, municipal, and local levels (health departments, law enforcement, executive offices) in order to keep track of the virus' impact and their obligations as employers maintaining safe workplaces within their communities.

CORONAVIRUS WORKPLACE PREPARATION CHECKLIST	✔ or NA
Federal Resources	
Review CDC guidelines for opening the workplace and cleaning offices. (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html)	
Review OSHA Guidance on preparing workplaces for COVID-19. (https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf)	
Posters	
Print and display personal hygiene posters and reminders in all bathrooms, work stations, and official posting locations.	
Post all mandated COVID-related posters such as the Families First Coronavirus Response Act notifications.	

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PPE	
Purchase and maintain stocks of face masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, and cleaning solutions for all employees who work onsite. Ensure cleaning products are not solely anti-bacterial (coronavirus is not a bacterium and therefore these products may not be effective). Consult EPA on appropriate chemicals and agents necessary to destroy/disinfect coronavirus. https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2	
Identify sources for PPE and sanitizing equipment including industry supplier organizations, cleaning and janitorial companies, promotional product companies.	
Work Stations	
Measure work stations and identify areas where social distancing of less than 6 feet exist that require reconfiguration.	
Build/install physical barriers between desks/work stations where possible/necessary.	
Redesign traffic patterns to restrict opportunities for employees to interact (change traffic patterns, color code work areas, and restrict employees to those areas, allocate restrooms/break areas by work location, etc.).	
Identify opportunities to establish new work stations to create social distancing (such as unused conference rooms, closed lobbies, utility closets, unused square footage).	
Avoid the need for employees to share phones, desks, offices, and other work tools and equipment including remote controls and AV equipment.	
Common Areas	
Prop open non-fire doors, such as those to bathrooms with inside stalls, work areas, office supplies, high traffic destinations that can be safely left open to avoid high-traffic touch points.	
Close down common areas where possible (including break rooms, kitchens, lounge areas) and consider its reuse as a work station.	
Post limits to the number of people that can be in common areas based on square footage. Place notices prominently.	
Hygiene	
Install hands-free soap dispensers or additional soap pumps and paper towel dispensers (hands free if possible) at all sink areas.	
Place touchless hand sanitizer stations on both sides of all doors that require handling, and at all high-touch areas such as printers, scanner stations, vending machines.	
Replace all water fountains with touchless water dispensers or replace with personal-use water bottles and a hand sanitizing dispenser.	
Food Safety	
Kitchen – remove coffee and all food products (sugar, tea, coffee, creamer), close and seal refrigerators. Limit the number of employees eating together. If necessary, remove tables/chairs. Consider giving employees coffee thermoses/insulated bags to replace need for kitchen.	
Contact food vendors to provide safe packaging, sealed food. If vending machines are used, place hand sanitizer nearby and wipe down machine throughout the day.	
Replace employee food celebrations with non-food gifts such as flowers, balloons, gift cards, and avoid in-person parties. Alternate celebration ideas include walking a celebrated employee through the building or hosting an outside gathering while maintaining social distancing.	

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Cleaning & Maintenance	
Identify professional cleaning company to provide deep-clean prior to re-opening business and to establish a relationship should ongoing decontamination cleaning be necessary.	
Improve ventilation in all areas where possible. Have HVAC maintenance and air filters replaced to maximize efficiency.	
Evaluate mail and delivery services to prioritize electronic communication where possible. Limit mail pickup/drop off areas and structure to maximize social distancing.	
Work from Home	
Identify all employees who can successfully tele-work full time or part time and maximize work from home opportunities for all employees who can do so.	
Develop appropriate work-from-home policies.	
Maximize use of technology for communication, including video conferencing in lieu of in-person meetings.	
Health Checks & Exposure	
Establish protocols for employees to report if they have been diagnosed with COVID-19, are experiencing symptoms or have been exposed. Ensure the privacy of all employees reporting COVID-19 experiences.	
Provide guidance on self-quarantining, medical consultation or treatment, and appropriate use of PPE and social distancing according to CDC guidelines if employee reports exposure or symptoms.	
Establish communication protocols for notifying employees of a workplace exposure, providing guidance to potentially exposed employees on self-quarantining, COVID-19 symptoms, safe hygiene, contact tracing within the workplace, and heightened use of PPE. Ensure privacy of exposed employee(s) in all communications.	
If choosing to do so, establish policy/approach to daily health checks, including reporting symptoms and temperature screening, before entering the workplace in accordance with CDC, EEOC, and state/local health directives. (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/general-business-faq.html)	
Identify necessary communication channels with state and local health agencies and track federal, state, and local governmental agencies that provide updates on the spread of coronavirus and related government directives.	
Scheduling	
Identify all individuals who require a modified work schedule due to child care, public transportation, ability to work from home, etc.	
Adjust work hours to allow for "shifts" including evening and weekend shifts to reduce the number of employees onsite at one time.	
Travel & Visitors	
Establish safety policy for those whose jobs require travel/client calls/interactions off workplace premises. Consider policy for video conferencing and check-ins with clients. Reach out to clients to adhere to their revised visitor/vendor/client call meeting policies.	
Establish policies for clients/guests regarding limiting/restricting access to workplace, health checks, and temperature screening.	
Establish policy regarding employee participation in meetings both on and offsite.	

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HR Policy Review	
Ensure all FFCRA leave request forms are current and up-to-date. Review Emergency Paid Family Leave requests as schools and daycare centers open up or close down. **FFCRA is currently voluntary from January 1, 2021 to March 31, 2021.**	
Review all PTO policies and consider COVID-related revisions such as special COVID leave for those who have exhausted federal paid leave and personal PTO, consider a communal PTO bank for those with excess PTO given their inability to travel, consider a COVID carry-over or PTO payout for 2020-2021.	
Review Workers Compensation policy with insurance carriers to identify any new COVID-19 policy riders or changes to comp policy.	
Develop remote/virtual recruiting, interviewing, and onboarding process as necessary.	
Leadership	
Communicate employer's commitment to employee/customer/community safety and health.	
Be positive, supportive, empathetic, understanding, and consistent in all communications with employees. Remember, all eyes are on you and taking your lead on how to respond.	
Lead by example on social distancing, PPE use, adhering to new COVID-19 related policies.	
Solicit staff input on cleaning office, social distancing, workplace redesign, shifts and breaks, and other workplace adjustments.	
Emphasize personal responsibility inside and outside of the workplace.	
Training	
Train employees on social distancing and provide guidance on discontinuing hand shaking, touching, hugging. Again, lead by example on social distancing.	
Train employees on proper sanitation and prevention techniques including hand washing, covering coughs, cleaning desks, phones, high-touch areas.	
If using them, train on proper PPE use and disposal/reuse.	
If using them, train on administration of temperature and health screenings.	
Train employees on how to safely get to and from the office while commuting and in public.	
Vaccine	
Encourage employees to receive to COVID-19 vaccine when available. Consider offering paid time off and, if applicable, covering expense for these appointments. Lead by example and get your vaccine when it is your turn if you are able. Plan how to handle time off needed due to potential side effects.	
Review section K of the EEOC's FAQ's before considering requiring employees to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Know that not all employees will be able to get the vaccine and there are several factors to consider if requiring it.	
Watch our video answering questions about COVID-19 vaccines.	

As you can see, some of these tasks are regulatory and technical and some are inspirational, including leading by example while in your workplace. While returning to work during a global health pandemic is frightening and uncertain, your commitment to safety, communication, and compassion will ensure your workplace and your workers remain productive, healthy, and well.

Should you need any assistance or advice as you manage your workplace in the midst of the coronavirus, don't hesitate to contact us at Affinity HR Group. It is our purpose to help you.