



Addressing the impact of COVID-19 Return-to-work readiness

Over the past few months, companies have reacted swiftly to unprecedented workplace and workforce disruptions caused by the COVID-19 crisis. Many companies have made difficult decisions and navigated the delicate balance between the needs of their business and the needs of their workforce. This includes managing safety protocols, remote workforces, reduced schedules, furloughs, and layoffs.

As companies prepare to reopen their workplaces, they must consider several specific issues, including: (1) adherence to stricter workplace health measures to limit exposure and transmission of COVID-19; (2) regulatory requirements surrounding bringing employees back to work; and (3) employee circumstances that may necessitate flexibility. It is imperative that companies review existing policies, update language, and draft new policies and procedures to address these issues.

Now is the time to act swiftly, but thoughtfully, and adopt the necessary changes. Begin by understanding that short-term decisions may well have long-term impacts.

Critical questions

- How do we maintain productivity while ensuring a safe working environment?
- What should be done to limit workplace exposure?
- What factors are involved when making hiring and re-hiring decisions?
- How do we alleviate employee concerns about returning to the workplace?
- How do we accommodate employees' increased external obligations?

Actions to enable

- Remain up-to-date with applicable laws and guidelines related to safety protocols, health screenings, data privacy, hiring processes, and leaves of absence
- Re-examine existing company policies and procedures, and update language and draft new policies where necessary
- Regularly communicate relevant policies and procedures to employees and provide implementation training as required

In preparation for employees returning to the workplace, organizations should consider their obligations to protect employees' rights, safety, and well-being.

Transitioning back to the workplace

Ready the workplace

- Establish guidelines on personal protective equipment usage at the workplace (e.g., masks, gloves)
- Develop plans and scheduling for frequent worksite deep cleaning and decontamination
- Create guidelines that incorporate social distancing practices into all aspects of the day (e.g., common area usage, meeting room capacity, cafeterias, etc.)

In the course of work

- Evaluate efficacy of employee temperature testing and/or health screening and develop policies and processes for administration
- Prescribe clear procedures for sending and keeping employees away from the workplace while symptomatic
- Establish protocols for employees who exhibit symptoms while traveling for work to notify management and seek care promptly
- Develop protocols to notify potentially exposed employees while respecting confidentiality

Assemble the workforce

- Evaluate employment related decisions and avoid adverse impact to protected classes when reviewing hiring, re-hiring, and compensation
- Review the complexities of exempt employees who are now in non-exempt positions due to redeployment during the crisis
- Review statutory and contractual requirements for rehiring those who may have severed employment as a result of a furlough/layoff (e.g., reprocessing work authorizations, background screenings and drug testing protocols)

Managing the workforce

Communicate regularly

- Review new and existing policies and procedures with employees
- Establish safe and secure channels for employees to voice questions and concerns to management
- Proactively promote an inclusive working environment

Administer leaves and accommodations

- Prepare to respond to more employee work accommodation requests due to COVID-19
- Continue to monitor regulations regarding leave of absence and update tracking accordingly
- Understand applicable job protection laws and ensure adherence

Increase flexibility

- Enable remote working options as not all employees may feel comfortable or be able to return to the workplace
- Consider allowing flexible work schedules to accommodate employee family care obligations
- Emphasize policies that promote physical, mental, financial, and social well-being

Contact:

For more information on how to respond, recover and thrive:

- Connect to Deloitte leaders www.deloitte.com/COVID-19-leaders
- Visit www.deloitte.com/COVID-19

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