

COVID-19: Ensuring a Safe Return to Work

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As employers around the world prepare to get employees back into the workplace, they need to build on the mandatory requirements being defined by the government in each operating country to ensure the safety of employees. Creating a safe working environment and one where employees feel secure and protected will be critical to enable employees bring their whole selves to work.

Many organizations will have spent time during lockdown planning for the full return of employees to their workplace. Below we have highlighted some of the best practices multinationals are taking as well as outlining key considerations for organizations as they return to full productivity.

Employee Recovery Post Lockdown

As employers develop strategies to support their employees mental and emotional needs coming out of COVID, they will need to personalize their approach according to employee circumstances. These will vary by employee based on numerous factors such as the personal experience with the virus, age, family situation, financial situation, coronavirus anxiety, geography and connection to the workplace during the pandemic. Fidelity has worked with employers to help segment their workforce to determine which of the following activities should be utilized.



How organizations can support their employee's commute

Employees are most concerned about the virus risk exposure of commuting to the workplace, specifically full compliance with social distancing on buses/railways

1. The Commute

Companies need to consider the logistics of getting staff to work, as well as determine how to deal with:

- **Car share programmes** will not be able to operate effectively as it will not be possible to socially distance, so mitigation plans will need to be developed.
- **Staggered start times/shifts** can help in part to ensure that public transportation and parking facilities are not overwhelmed.
- Employers are providing **face masks and disposable gloves** to employees that use public transport.

would reduce public transport capacity by approximately 90% according to statistics produced by the UK Government.

- **Alternative methods of transportation**, such as cycling and walking, could be encouraged. Many governments provide subsidies on alternative forms of transport, such as tax efficient purchasing of cycles, which can be promoted.
- Where employers provide **park and ride or work transportation**, planning for increased capacity to allow social distancing should be considered alongside extended hours of operation.



Operating a safe workplace environment

Although many employers expect to see greater prevalence of homeworking in contrast to the pre-quarantine days, a physical presence in many workplaces will still be needed. Once individuals are in the workplace it will take planning to ensure that the organization is compliant with government regulations and to implement best practices to ensure employees feel safe within the workplace.

2. Health & Safety

Companies are already implementing policy to:

- Check staff's temperature on entry (ideally encourage testing prior to leaving home). Some organizations have installed thermal cameras that check employees on entry to their facilities.
- Prioritize the employees that should return first based on critical functions, Covid-19 risk group, or personal circumstances so there is a clear plan for a phased approach.
- Consider shift rotations to reduce the risk of cross-contamination. This can help where social distancing prevents the whole workforce from returning to the workplace at the same times.
- Remove hot desking or hoteling.
- Limit use or restricted occupancy of elevators with exceptions made for employees with disabilities. Staircases could be used preferably with dedicated ones for ascending or descending.
- Increase frequency of cleaning and leveraging cleaning contractors to increase capacity and shifts, clean communal sites more regularly, have adequate PPE supplies to meet the demand. Make hand sanitizer, face masks and anti-bacterial wipes readily available throughout the workplace.
- Plan safe walking routes (such as one-way corridors) for staff - in offices, on factory floors and at building sites.
- Keep the canteens/kitchens/cafeterias (or where food is provided) closed until further notice. Drinking water taps should be made "out of use" with bottled water being provided.



Corporate support

Companies are continuing to review their benefit programs, including those associated with home working, to ensure they are continuing to provide support to their workforce.

3. Corporate Benefits

As needs will inevitably change the programs should be developed accordingly, examples of the benefits and allowances to be assessed include:

- offering additional leave to deal with the impact of COVID-19
- allowing roll over of vacation days not taken by year end
- changing gym subsidies to fitness reimbursements to allow subscriptions to online fitness programs or the purchase of home fitness equipment
- promoting mental well-being programs with subscriptions to apps which support employees to develop their mental resilience



Recurring peaks

4. Preparing for the Future

According to most expert opinions the likelihood of recurring waves of COVID-19 is fairly high. This may differ by country or even by regions/states. With a second peak, it is a possibility that lockdown procedures seen in the last few months may again occur. Organizations should develop plans for the possibility of future closures or enforced home working at what could be short notice.

For More Information

To discuss any of the above, or support for your global benefits or mobility programs, please contact your Fidelity Managing Director or one of our global benefits consultants listed below.

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