



Return to Work – Assessing the Risk and Actions to Mitigate Them

This document is meant to provide a framework for deciding and preparing a company to return employees to work. We will all continue to navigate and learn within the landscape of COVID19. Our hope is this resource helps your organization prepare for returning employees to a place where they feel comfortable performing their jobs safely.

Returning to work should be something that the leadership team carefully debates and decides. Under the circumstances today, this decision is layered with complexity and should not be taken lightly.

Several questions the leadership team should have clarity on:

- What departments need to return to the workspace and why? What's working or not working with telework/remote work as it is today?
- Is there a financial need or outcome to deliver that is best met if employees return now?
- Is the office ready to be re-inhabited? Was it deep cleaned? Can you reassure employees that they will be safe entering the workspace?
- Is it mandatory to return to the office full time?
- Will telework be allowed for those employees who continue to have constraints for childcare?
- Is the business prepared to take the necessary precautions to protect the employees?
- What happens if employees come back to work and get sick?
- Is the business prepared to conduct screenings and protect confidential employee information?
- Will the company provide training on how to maintain a safe workspace?

If the decision is to bring employees back to work, here are things to consider or put in place:

- **Consider establishing a COVID19 Response Team.** Depending on the size of your company, ensure that you have an appropriate representation from all key levels. If your company has separate divisions or brands with different leaders assigned, make sure to include leaders from every part of the business.
- **Develop communications that inform the employees of their return to work status.** It is suggested to follow the communication process used when closing the office to reopen it. What are the terms of the return to work? The communication plans should not only inform of the business expectations, it must state terms of employment and compensation for each employee. The communication should include steps being taken to ensure employee safety.

- **Prepare the Facility.** Whether you own or rent your office space, the responsibility to ensure the workspace is safe is on the business owner and leadership team. Work with experts who can reassure you that a deep clean has been done and you have eliminated *Sick Building Syndrome* from your list of concerns. OSHA and CDC have guidelines and resources to assist in this area.
- **Establish a COVID Prevention Plan.** This plan should entail all the protocols, tools and resources that will be in effect within your company/office to prevent and manage COVID19. Execution of this plan should reassure your employees you have thought through their return to work. Elements of this plan are onsite testing, training, access to prevention supplies and resources and how-to's so that every employee understands their responsibilities for prevention and the implications for not taking prevention seriously.
- **Prepare for the Psychology of Return to Work.** Returning to work may be an escape from the challenges of home life for some employees, but not all employees will be happy or comfortable. Many employees will be dealing with some residual affects from this pandemic. Challenges and anxiety may be related to their own preexisting conditions, returning to the office and being in an uncontrollable workspace of virus laden colleagues, challenges related to caring for other family members, financial implications of layoffs, furloughs or salary reductions. Establish EAP options for employees to seek and get help if needed.
- **Understand the Employment Laws related to Return to Work.** FMLA, Expanded FMLA, Emergency Paid Sick Leave, OSHA, DOL, Labor Relations Board, EEOC, etc., will all be at play in your return to work transition. Be informed and advised on what rules are at play for the decisions being made at every level of the organization. One leader's decision can set off a chain of unfavorable events and place a company in a PR or legal mess.

Links to Tools and Resources:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet.pdf>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>
- <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>
- https://www.osha.gov/dts/osta/otm/otm_iii/otm_iii_2.html#2
- <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3989.pdf>
- https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WHD/posters/FFCRA_Poster_WH1422_Non-Federal.pdf
- <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>

This document and its content were created in collaboration between **NOLA SHRM** and **Northshore SHRM**.

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NSHRM; Northshore Society for Human Resource Management has been the voice for the Human Resources community located on the Northshore of Lake Pontchartrain in Louisiana since 1999. With more than 150 employers represented contributing to matters related to business, legislative affairs and professional development for Human Resources.

