

Planning to Reopen

Before inviting employees—and customers—to return to your place of business, you should institute a plan to help maintain safety and reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. An effective plan should encompass at least five fundamental strategies:

1. CONSIDER A STAGGERED APPROACH

- Look for guidance from your local government on re-opening rules and procedures
- Limit the number of employees returning to the office; consider using alternate-day schedules or staggered hours during the transition
- Establish elevator social distancing guidelines, and consider changing 'late' policies to allow extra time
- Confirm which employees travel to and from work via public transport and allow them to travel at off-peak times
- Ask for volunteers for hourly and/or salary reductions before instituting layoffs
- Determine how to best care for and accommodate employees with existing high-risk conditions
- Host a virtual orientation or training session for employees on the safety protocols being put in place
- Implement an organization-wide policy for requests from workers who wish to remain working from home and/or for time-off, and ensure this policy remains consistent for all departments

2. DETERMINE YOUR SCREENING PROCESS

- Consider employee screening through the use of temperature tests, employer checks or self-checks
- Implement protocols that allow for employees to maintain their privacy while protecting their health
- Develop a log to keep track of employees who may have been tested, recovered, or who have antibodies
- Ensure that employees are aware of symptoms and what constitutes 'being sick'
- Ask employees to report any contact with people who have tested positive such as family members, friends, etc., and make consistent but case-by-case decisions on the level of caution needed

3. RECONFIGURE YOUR WORKPLACE

- Establish a plan to allow employees to maintain a minimum of six-foot spacing during all stages of work and reconfigure high-traffic areas to maintain social distance
- Consider the possible need for physical barriers such as plexiglass where distancing is impossible or impractical
- Set up rules limiting occupancy in communal areas such as conference rooms, wellness areas, and lunch areas
- Remove shared items temporarily, such as staplers and printers, and ensure employees have their own equipment
- Develop hand-washing protocols and post reminders on proper hygiene within bathrooms and kitchens
- Adopt staggered lunch hours and rest periods
- Implement a policy for visitors, including couriers, cleaning staff, deliveries and clients
- Review emergency evacuation procedures to ensure they allow for compliance with social distancing
- Distribute supplies to employees and within the office so that all staff have access to masks, hand sanitizer, gloves, and disinfectant
- Implement more robust cleaning and disinfecting procedures at both an individual and organization level

4. DEVELOP AND FORMALIZE A STANDARDIZED RESPONSE TO POTENTIAL POSITIVE CASES

- Consider the relevant laws and requirements regarding employees who receive positive tests
- Keep employees aware of any potential cases within the workplace while maintaining employee privacy
- Determine if there is a need to notify insurance carriers or other public authorities
- Review sick time requirements for employees who test positive
- Develop a procedure to deep clean infected employee workspaces
- Coordinate with landlords or building management on positive cases within the building
- Prepare for possible immediate temporary closures and develop procedures in the event of a shutdown
- Document new processes and follow them consistently

5. KEEP YOUR EMPLOYEES INFORMED, SAFE, AND MOTIVATED

- Ensure employees understand how to stay safe both in and outside the office
- Develop a special committee or task force to respond to questions and concerns raised by employees
- Update employee information and emergency contacts
- Consider hosting virtual happy hours or video trivia nights to improve morale
- Hand out protective gear, sanitizers and disinfectants for employees for use outside of the office
- Maintain good communication about expectations within the workplace
- Share mental health resources to help employees cope with the transition

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This information is to be used as a guide and is **not to be considered legal advice**. For additional information, please contact **Carol G. Dell, Esq., c.dell@hohlaw.com**

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