RETURNING TO THE WORKPLACE DURING COVID-19

CDC guidelines and state/local public health conditions and mandates will determine the timeline for employers to manage a phased re-opening. But employees should stay informed and can begin planning for their return to the workplace now.

Understand your local environment and what your employer is doing to keep you safe.

- Employers must be equipped to monitor their workforce for symptoms and maintain a safe work environment, including reconfiguring and routinely sanitizing workspaces, requiring masks and temperature checks, and enforcing social distancing.

- Non-essential workers and "vulnerable populations", such as older adults and those with underlying medical conditions, will be slower to return to the workplace. If you or someone you care for is considered a "vulnerable population", talk to your employer about options for telework and paid or unpaid leave.

- Mass transit systems will operate at lower capacity - possibly with more frequent service - to enforce social distancing and meet the demand for staggered work hours. If you rely on mass transit, check schedules and safety protocols frequently.

- Schools, camps and daycare programs will be slower to re-open than many businesses and will operate below capacity as well. Make sure your employer knows that this will limit how soon you can return to the workplace.

Know the benefits and programs available to you.

- Be sure you understand your company's policies on flexible and remote work, paid and unpaid leave, as well as telehealth and EAP programs that can support you and your family in times of illness, stress and anxiety.

- Some companies have temporarily expanded benefits or relaxed eligibility requirements for benefits such as backup care, paid sick leave, family and parental leave, and paid time off. Check your eligibility and any paperwork that is required, so you are ready to utilize them.

- Check whether you may be eligible for additional federal, state, or municipal benefits, such as FMLA, the new FFCRA or other sick leave for public health emergencies.

- Many employees will continue to telework for the foreseeable future. Stay informed about updates to your employer's flexible and remote work policies and supports.

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Make a plan for your dependents.

- Check in frequently with schools, camps and daycare programs about their plans for re-opening. How much capacity will they have? Will they be utilizing shifts or staggered schedules? What are their plans for enforcing social distancing and maintaining a safe environment?

- Work with your partner to devise a schedule that enables one of you to be home, while the other is at work. Consider alternating days or a week at a time.

- Ask your employer about backup care options in your area, including any new benefits or providers they may have added.

- Use your network to identify caregivers you can bring into your home, such as college students, and make explicit agreements about precautions they must take both inside and outside your home.

Coordinate your return to work with your manager and co-workers.

- It is likely that employees will return to the workplace in shifts and on staggered schedules. Consult with your manager and team members about their plans to return either to spread out coverage or to find times of overlap, if necessary.

- Determine which aspects of your job can be performed remotely, so that you are clear and efficient with the work that must get done in the workplace.

- Employers may give you some discretion in returning to the workplace. If so, consider phasing back your return slowly to determine the schedule and approach that work best for you and your family.

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