MERCER

return to the workplace

transition forward
quick reference guide

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we work, and these changes are permeating far beyond the peak of the contagion. As we navigate these uncharted waters, we find ourselves dealing simultaneously with a health and economic crisis.

As provinces begin to relax stay-at-home mandates, employers are faced with returning their workforces to the workplace. Although many are eager to get back to normal, there's wide acknowledgement that "normal" will look different.

There are both human and business risks associated with returning to the workplace. To help you identify and solve for these issues, Mercer and Marsh have leveraged our collective expertise in workforce strategies, health & wellbeing and risk management to create a framework for returning to the workplace with confidence.

Navigating the pandemic response lifecycle

Employers will move through three distinct phases as they navigate the pandemic: Respond, Return, and Reinvent. Employers will alternate between the phases depending on the course of the pandemic, government responses, and the resilience of their industry and business.

- Respond: Immediate actions employers are taking. Reactive, focused on ensuring business continuity.
- Return: As the spread of the virus slows, people and businesses will return to a "new" normal.
- Reinvent: Disruption brings opportunity to reflect, reset, and reinvigorate. In rising to meet the demands of a changed world, businesses will need to reinvent themselves while holding true to their purpose.

Respond   **Return**   **Reinvent**
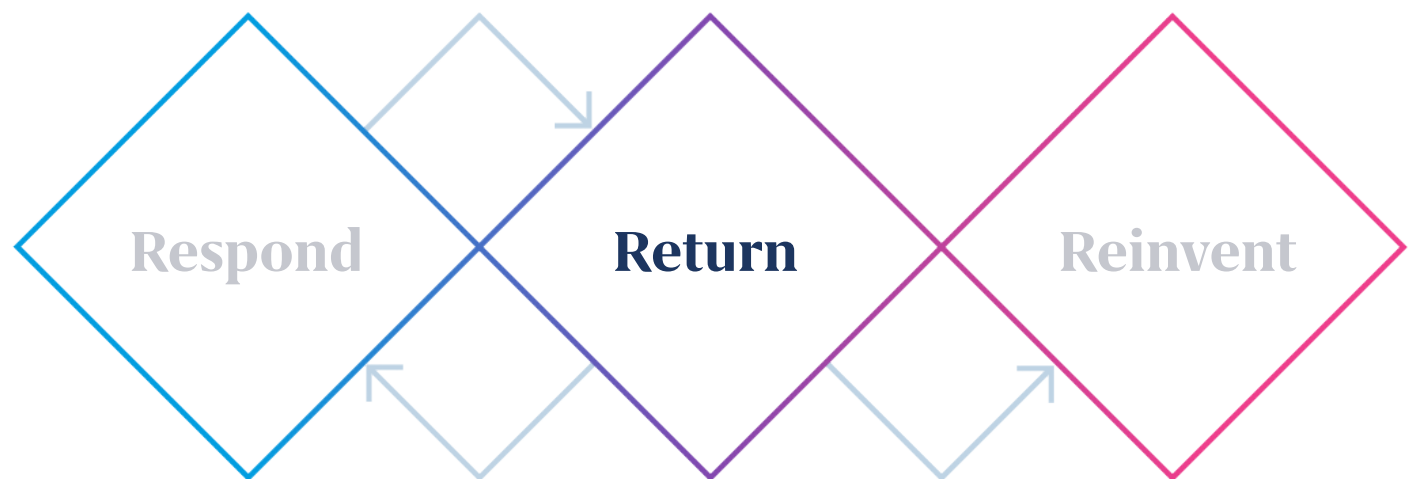
Our strategic approach to returning to the workplace is centered on three areas: Workplace and Worker Readiness, Workforce Support, and Enterprise Resilience.

Use this checklist to begin.

Workplace and worker readiness
Identifying and preparing employees to return to the workplace.

Workplace

- ☐ Workplace opening validation: Establish cross-functional teams (security, safety, HR, legal, etc.) to validate worksite for opening.

- ☐ Functional redesign: Protect workers, customers and other visitors by constructing an environment that allows for social distancing.

- ☐ Cleaning: Establish processes for frequent, consistent, and diligent cleaning. Consider processes for cleaning upon positive confirmed exposure (e.g. contract with trained personnel to perform deep cleaning).

Worker

- ☐ Identification: Determine if workplace return will happen in waves – by location, function, risk stratification, etc.

- ☐ Screening and attestation: Most practical route is self-attestation. Such screenings are considered medical information. Therefore maintaining privacy is necessary, which should apply across temperature, COVID-19 or antibody screenings.

- ☐ Personal Protective Equipment: May help limit spread in the workplace, especially where employees may have a difficult time maintaining social distancing.

- ☐ Communications: Clearly communicate workplace rules and policies for exposure and quarantine upfront, and establish a regular cadence for ongoing communications.

Workforce support
Strategies to support employees as they return to the workplace and strategies to support remote workers.

- ☐ Compensation and rewards: Determine if new incentives are warranted by market conditions.

- ☐ Talent management: Review people structure to ensure it still meets the need of business and prepare succession planning for future pandemics.

- ☐ Health and welfare benefits: Evaluate healthcare coverage, leave / PTO policies.

- ☐ Digital health strategy: Build out digital offerings to ensure continued virtual access to those who are unable to, or prefer not to, receive physical care.

- ☐ Behavioral health: Ensure suite of offerings provides support in the post-pandemic world, including social/worksite anxiety, PTSD or "survivor syndrome".

- ☐ Family support: Establish child care, eldercare and caregiving support for those who need to return to work, but are responsible for children out of school, sick relatives, etc.

- ☐ Remote-first strategies: Create a thriving remote-first environment for those employees who will not immediately return to a physical work environment.

- ☐ Communications: Clearly communicate available support upfront and establish a regular cadence for ongoing communications.

- ☐ Travel: Determine best approach to phase in return to business travel and global mobility.

Enterprise resilience
Preparation and planning for mitigation of future outbreaks and potential impacts.

- ☐ Policies overhaul: Establish plans for exposure/quarantine, crisis management, and situational monitoring for future pandemics, or resurgence of COVID-19.

- ☐ Pandemic preparation: Revise and refine business disruption plan. Establish c-suite and board pandemic advisory, and deploy analytic services for decision-making.

- ☐ Population health: Analyze employee demographics and clinical trends to establish guidelines on when stricter response measures are necessary.

- ☐ Listen: Consider pulse surveys and other tools to conduct focus groups and gather feedback on the employee "return to the workplace" experience.

- ☐ Communications: Clarify plans for continued monitoring and intervention, as well as preparation for future pandemics, to employees.

Reshaping the future.

About Mercer

At Mercer, we redefine the world of work, reshape retirement and investment outcomes, and define new possibilities for health and wellbeing. Our aim is to look to the future by focusing on the needs of today. We help our clients navigate uncertainty and a rapidly changing environment that is transforming the way we work.

With more than 70 years of experience, we provide trusted advice and solutions by understanding data and applying it with a human touch. We drive change by turning ideas into action, positioning our clients, colleagues, and communities for the future.

How We Can Help

Continuously rethinking purpose and priorities drives HR transformation. Shaping the future of work requires improved strategies around investment and retirement, health and wellness benefits, talent and communications. We believe in the value of investing in the future to build resilience for your business and your employees.

Together with our clients, we find ways to elevate the employee experience with effective compensation and communication strategies. Through investments in reskilling and learning, we focus on developing strengths that the workforce of the future needs.

Investments and retirement require sophisticated solutions. We approach these with a big picture view that prioritizes long term financial wellness. We offer research and advice on assessing risk and designing benefits programs while keeping in mind the need to optimize throughout changing times.

As part of our forward-thinking approach, we provide strategies to foster healthy lifestyles with innovative health and wellness benefits. Mercer Marsh Benefits consultants help you provide personalized benefits options that suit a range of employees' needs. We understand that today's workforce is multi-generational and diverse, and we're prepared to create solutions with you that support employees, wherever they work.

For further information, please visit
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