



Return to Work: Health & Safety Checklist

safely re-open

Organizations and employees around Wisconsin are eager to get back to work, but it won't be as simple as opening the doors and returning to business as usual.

Even with more of the population vaccinated every day, we still must all take personal responsibility to practice good hygiene, etiquette and social distancing to slow the spread of the virus. Additionally, employers need to be ready with plans to ensure the health and safety of returning workers, customers and the general public.





What to Consider

As businesses reopen, they should take time to review the [industry specific guidelines](#) provided by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation and assess potential adjustments to operations.

Three key concerns remain constant as organizations transition back to the workplace: safety precautions, comprehensive sick leave policies, and an accompanying communication plan to inform people about developments at appropriate times.

Before reopening, you need a strategy in place that addresses these key concerns for the short- and long-term. This checklist will walk you through important considerations for devising a custom plan for your workplace.

Workplace Safety Precautions

Increasing numbers of customers and returning employees will make continued enforcement of workplace safety—good hygiene, etiquette and physical distancing—paramount in maintaining a slow spread of the virus.

Both the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have produced guidance for maintaining safe working environments.

For that guidance to be effective, however, employers need to perform a safety risk assessment specific to their organizations.

Risk Assessment

Consider the known risks of the transmission and spread of COVID-19, according to the CDC:

- Respiratory infection spread mainly among people who are in close contact.
- Transmitted when an infected person coughs or sneezes and respiratory droplets land in the mouths or noses of, or are inhaled by, others nearby.
- Spread by people who are not showing symptoms.
- The virus may remain viable for hours or days on surfaces.

Consider how these known transmission risks impact your workplace and identify your specific safety concerns related to virus spread. Below are some questions for your team to consider.

- ☐ What is your employees' level of interaction with customers, vendors or suppliers?

More contact with people means greater risk of exposure.

- ☐ Do coworkers typically share equipment? Which equipment?

Shared equipment needs to be disinfected between users.

- ☐ How is your workplace laid out? Are your entry points controlled?

Controlled access limits exposure.

- ☐ How savvy are your employees with using safety equipment?

If employees already wear PPE, it reduces the learning curve.

- ☐ How close are coworkers to each other?

Closer proximity to coworkers for extended periods of time means greater risk of exposure.

- ☐ How well do your employees adapt to and follow safety procedures?

The effectiveness of any precaution is largely dependent upon employee participation and compliance.

Controls Available

Consider what actions you can take to mitigate the spread of disease in your workplace. This will be different for every type of organization because the controls available are different. Start broadly and then narrow your scope to specific procedures and policies you could put in place.

- ☐ Are you prepared to alter business practices to resume operations? If so, what does this look like to you?

Consider basics that you must have in place to serve customers.

Use your network to ask questions, get ideas and set benchmarks.

Participate in industry roundtable discussions or attend webinars to get a sense of what similar businesses are doing.





Possible Policies and Procedures

- ❑ Common and frequently used surfaces need to be cleaned and disinfected regularly. Employees must wash hands and cover coughs and sneezes. What policies and procedures would allow you to routinely clean and disinfect the workplace?
 - Workers have access to running water and soap.
 - Provide hand sanitizers at workstations.
 - Provide tissues and no-touch garbage cans.
 - Provide sanitizing disposable wipes at workstations.
 - Increase frequency of housekeeping.
 - Add cleaning responsibilities for workers.
- ❑ Proper social distancing requires at least 6 feet of space between people. How can you facilitate social distancing in your workplace?
 - Employees work remotely.
 - Stagger shifts to reduce exposure among coworkers.
 - Increase physical distance between workers and each other and workers and customers.
 - Put up physical barriers to separate people.
 - Deliver products or pick up supplies without physical interaction with other humans (i.e., leave at the door).
 - Wear PPE: Masks, face shields, etc.
- ❑ Determine how COVID-19 safety controls will fit into your current workplace safety plan and disciplinary policies.
 - How long will it take to put procedures in place?
 - How will you enforce the policies and procedures you put in place?
 - Will enforcement differ from other safety policies? Will it be punitive?

Best practices include communicating expectations clearly, training employees on tools and resources available to them, and holding everyone (regardless of position) accountable for complying with the policies and procedures.

Sick Leave Policies

The COVID-19 pandemic is a fluid and ever-evolving situation. It is highly likely that everyone will be exposed to the virus at some point, so you need to plan for sick employees.

Sick employees and suspected sick employees cannot remain in the workplace. You will want to review the following:

❑ **What are your current sick leave policies?**

- Do you offer paid sick leave? How many days?
- Do you offer personal leave of absence?
- Do you offer short-term disability insurance?

❑ **Who is responsible for administration of leave?**

- Does your current administrator have the knowledge and bandwidth to manage an influx of requests?

❑ **What procedures will you follow when employees are sick with COVID-19?**

- How will employees notify supervisors if they feel sick at work?
- Where will you separate and detain sick employees to send them home?
- What is your plan to work with local health officials to track others who may have been exposed to sick employees?

❑ **What is your company culture around sick leave?**

- Do employees use sick days or stockpile them?
- Do you have long-standing practices of working while sick?
- Is it considered a badge of honor to work while sick?
- Have you cross trained employees to perform essential functions?
- Can you hire contract or temporary workers when employees need to be absent?



Communicating with Employees & Encouraging Participation

At every phase of your plan, you need to think about how and when you will communicate information to employees. The sooner you can communicate your short-term and long-term plans with employees, the sooner they can prepare to return.

An absence of information leaves room for assumptions and gossip. Communicating early and comprehensively will help relieve anxiety of the unknown.

Create a detailed communication plan alongside your phased transition plan. Determine at what point in the process department managers, supervisors and employees need to know specific information. Planning ahead gives you time to work with the appropriate parties to create announcements, design any necessary materials and share frequently asked questions (FAQs).

Along with providing news and information, your communication plan should fulfill three main objectives for your company's plan to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. It should:

- Define expectations for behaviors and actions
- Encourage employee participation in compliance
- Promote a positive company culture

Define Expectations

It may seem silly with all the news coverage around COVID-19, but assume your employees know nothing.

- ☐ Start with the facts about the risks. There is a lot of misinformation in the world, and it is important for employees to understand why their actions matter.
- ☐ Guide them through a typical day from start to finish.
 - Are you taking temperatures? Do they report to a specific area?
 - Where do they take breaks? What are the restrictions?
 - How have safety protocols changed? Give instructions for PPE, cleaning and social distancing.
- ☐ Set the expectation that employees must not work if they or family members are sick.
 - Explain how sick leave works and what their options are.
 - Tell them the protocols in place for reporting symptoms or illness from home and while on the job.
 - Explain the steps in the process after reporting. Leave no room for fear of the unknown or surprises

□ Encourage Participation

- Reassure employees that there are no punitive responses for reporting illness. There is no pride or bravery in working while sick—it only puts everyone at risk.
- Remind employees to follow new safety protocols and procedures.
- This is outside the norm—it's easy to forget and fall into old habits and routines.
- Communicate often and via various methods.
 - Text messages; email; signs at workstations, in breakrooms and bathroom stalls. Consider short videos or podcasts. Keep the message in front of them.
- Consider a reward system for employees who consistently follow the rules. Make the prizes small, attainable spiffs so rewards are ongoing and announced frequently.

□ Promote Positive Culture

- Share success stories and positive news.
- People like to understand how their actions contribute to the whole.
- Ask employees for their feedback on current operations and safety procedures. Front line employees are often the most creative problem solvers because they are doing the job all day.
- Foster an atmosphere of transparency. It's possible to exude confidence and still be honest about the uncertainty. No one in the whole world knows how this will go. We are all doing it for the first time together and we need to share information so we can learn and adapt.

Additional Guidance

There are no easy answers here, but careful consideration of your specific circumstances and business needs will get you one step closer to making good decisions for the health of your organization and your employees. We encourage you to reach out to our knowledgeable team to answer any questions you may have.

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