



# Preparing for the 'New Normal' **EMPLOYER READINESS ASSESSMENT**

Key questions and recommendations for the  
post-emergency phase of COVID-19.

March 11, 2022



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# Keys to Success in the New Normal:

Information, Preparation,  
Flexibility & Adaptability



## WELL INFORMED

Your company's ability to respond to fast-changing conditions depends on timely access to key **information**.

## EQUIPPED TO RESPOND

Businesses that are **prepared** for a new surge of cases and ready with **flexible** policies can maintain greater confidence in their return-to-work protocols. And they can better **adapt** to local conditions, whether they improve or worsen.

## GET STARTED

Use our assessment tool to **assess your company's readiness** to respond to the changing landscape of COVID-19 and future pandemics. Find helpful tips to **bolster business resilience** and tap into our recommended resources.



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# SECTION 1

## ASSESSING YOUR COMPANY'S READINESS



# Is Your Company Informed?

Use the latest CDC data-tracking tools and other key metrics to make informed decisions.

## ASSESS YOUR INFORMATION

- ❑ Are you using the CDC's updated [COVID-19 Community Levels](#) to track your local risk and set safe rules for masking?
- ❑ What is your local community vaccination rate?
- ❑ Do you know your employees' vaccination status?
- ❑ Are employees routinely tested for COVID-19?
- ❑ Do you do daily temperature checks and health assessments?
- ❑ Are you tracking the risk level in communities where employees may be traveling for work?
- ❑ Are you reporting cases/deaths to your public health department?
- ❑ Is your company in regular touch with your local public health department for up-to-date information on community resources and opportunities to collaborate on community health?





# Is Your Workplace Prepared?

Encouraging vaccinations and preventing the spread of COVID-19 will remain essential in 2022. You can support both goals through your company policies and workplace operations.



## ASSESS YOUR POLICIES

- ❑ Do you have a [company vaccination requirement](#)?
- ❑ Are you maintaining separate accommodations for exempt (unvaccinated) workers?
- ❑ Do you offer paid time off for employees to get themselves and family members vaccinated?
- ❑ Do you offer paid sick leave to allow workers to stay home whenever they feel unwell and when they need to quarantine or isolate?
- ❑ Are you continuing to supply vaccine/booster education and correct misinformation?
- ❑ Does your company have a non-retaliation policy and anonymous process for workers to report safety concerns?

## ASSESS YOUR OPERATIONS

- ❑ Have you upgraded indoor ventilation?
- ❑ Does your company have a supply of tests for workers?
- ❑ Do you have a stock of high-quality masks to distribute as needed?
- ❑ Do your workspaces accommodate social distancing?
- ❑ Are your sanitation protocols up to date?
- ❑ Have you reduced frequent touchpoints with hands-free solutions?
- ❑ Is your workplace prepared to offer on-site booster shots if they're required by a new variant?

# Are You Prepared to Support Your Workers?

Supporting your employees—on mental health, new caregiving responsibilities at home, or continued vulnerability to disease—will be important to your business' ability to adapt to future conditions.



## ASSESS SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

- ❑ Are you supporting employees who wish to continue wearing masks?
- ❑ Do you have a policy to address employee concerns about working with unvaccinated colleagues or in unsafe conditions?
- ❑ Are you seeking and incorporating employee feedback—including from workers representing disproportionately affected populations—into your planning for future health challenges?
- ❑ Do you offer support/flexibility for employees with new family care responsibilities?
- ❑ Are managers trained to check in on employees' mental well-being and needs?
- ❑ Do your company have employee resource groups for diverse populations, mental health, or other affinity needs?
- ❑ Do your employees have access to affordable healthcare through your company's health insurance?
- ❑ Does your insurance plan comply with the Mental Health Parity Act?
- ❑ Does your company offer an Employee Assistance Program? Have you assessed its offerings to meet post-pandemic mental health challenges?
- ❑ Are you regularly communicating about your benefits with employees?

# Are Your Plans Flexible?

Businesses that plan for flexibility in their operations will be best positioned to survive and thrive through changing conditions.

## ASSESS YOUR FLEXIBILITY

- ❑ Are you inviting your workers to help identify creative and flexible solutions?
- ❑ Are employees cross-trained in other company functions in the event of an outbreak at your workplace?
- ❑ Are you prepared to hire temporary workers to supplement your workforce if employees get sick?
- ❑ Are you prepared to move part or all of your workforce to a remote/hybrid model?
- ❑ Have you identified ways to amplify social distancing protocols if needed?
- ❑ Are any operations appropriate to move outdoors?
- ❑ Are you working with other your local businesses to identify cooperative and creative solutions during a public health crisis?





# Adapt to Changing Conditions

## Low Community Level

Use the CDC's COVID-19 Community Level tracker and other key metrics to evaluate and inform changes in your business response.

### IF...

- ❑ Community spread and hospitalization rates are low

### AND...

- ❑ Your workforce is highly vaccinated
- ❑ There are no outbreaks among your workforce

### THEN:

- ❑ Help your employees keep their vaccinations up to date
- ❑ Upgrade indoor ventilation
- ❑ Support employees who choose to keep wearing masks
- ❑ Post visual cues for social distancing recommendations
- ❑ Consider making masks available on site for high-risk workers or those who choose to wear a mask
- ❑ Continue to follow CDC quarantine and isolation guidance for workers are exposed or test positive for COVID-19.

# Adapt to Changing Conditions

## Moderate Community Level

Use the CDC's COVID-19 Community Level tracker and other key metrics to evaluate and inform changes in your business response.

### IF...

- ❑ Community spread and hospitalization rates are moderate

### OR...

- ❑ Your workforce vaccination rate is low
- ❑ There is an outbreak among your workforce

### THEN:

- ❑ Make masks available for high-risk workers
- ❑ Consider requiring masks for unvaccinated workers
- ❑ Require masks for workers who have been exposed to COVID-19
- ❑ Consider weekly testing of unvaccinated employees
- ❑ Consider expanding hybrid or remote work options
- ❑ Implement protocols for social distancing
- ❑ Consider allowing business travel only for vaccinated employees
- ❑ Help your employees keep their vaccinations up to date
- ❑ Upgrade indoor ventilation
- ❑ Continue to follow CDC quarantine and isolation guidance for workers who are exposed to or test positive for COVID-19

# Adapt to Changing Conditions

## High Community Level

Use the CDC's COVID-19 Community Level tracker and other key metrics to evaluate and inform changes in your business response.

### IF...

- ❑ Community spread and hospitalization rates are high



### THEN:

- ❑ Require masks indoors for all workers
- ❑ Require weekly testing for all workers
- ❑ Pivot to remote work where possible
- ❑ Enforce social distancing protocols on site
- ❑ Consider suspending company travel
- ❑ Help your employees keep their vaccinations up to date
- ❑ Maintain improved ventilation
- ❑ Continue to follow CDC quarantine and isolation guidance for workers are exposed or test positive for COVID-19

# SECTION 2



## **TIPS FOR BUSINESS RESILIENCE:** Targeted Actions for 2022



# Prioritize Vaccination

A workforce whose vaccinations are up to date will continue to provide the safest possible environment for employees and customers.

## VACCINATION TIPS

- Vaccine requirements work. Companies that implemented a vaccine requirement saw vaccination rates increase by an average of 35 percentage points. Employee separations due to vaccination policies are often lower than 1%.
- Offering paid time off for vaccinations and recovery reduces barriers for low-income employees. Provide PTO for employees to accompany eligible family members, too.
- Employers and managers should approach employee concerns about vaccinations with empathy, but “bridge” back to core messaging about the effectiveness of vaccines.
- Help employees keep their vaccinations up to date by sharing booster eligibility information and continuing to offer paid time off for booster shots.
- Consider offering on-site clinics for routine vaccinations, including both the flu and COVID-19.



# Improve Ventilation

Since COVID-19 spreads through the air, improved ventilation will help keep your workplace safe going forward.

## VENTILATION TIPS

- Look for ways to increase outdoor air inside by opening doors or windows, creating cross-breeze, opening outdoor air dampers on HVAC systems to reduce air recirculation, or adding window fans.
- Inspect and maintain exhaust ventilation.
- Run the HVAC system at maximum outside airflow for 2 hours before and after the workplace is occupied.
- Use portable HEPA fans or filtration systems where possible.
- Consider installing upper-room ultraviolet germicidal irradiation (UVGI) systems to clean the air where ventilation and filtration options are limited.
- Consider modifying outdoor spaces with expanded seating and weather protection to allow for workers to utilize them for breaks, meals or gatherings.
- Assess the layout of indoor workspaces including worker activity and movement and implement filtration and ventilation to ensure “clean” to “less clean” directional airflow.





# Build Surge Capacity

Learn from shortages in tests, masks, and labor supply by building your own capacity.

## SURGE CAPACITY TIPS

- Stock sufficient supplies of N95 masks to distribute to workers if needed.
- Keep supplies of rapid antigen tests to support your company's ability to test employees regularly.
- Many homes have not ordered the four free COVID-19 tests available to them through the federal government at [covidtests.gov](https://covidtests.gov). A second set of four free tests is also now available through the site. Promote this resource to your workers and encourage them to test themselves as needed.
- Make sure employees know that all health insurance plans are required to reimburse the cost of up to eight at-home COVID-19 tests per month for each person on the plan, as well as any details employees may need to meet your health plans' requirements.
- Maintain your knowledge of which teams and operations can work remotely and refresh any processes you need to activate remote work.
- Cross-train employees to enhance institutional knowledge and build flexibility for illness and other absences. ["T-Shaped" employee training](#) prepares employees to maintain a depth of knowledge in their core responsibilities, and incorporate a broad working knowledge in other aspects of the company.
- Ensure that staffing agencies or other labor providers are aware of and compliant with any workplace policies, including mask or vaccination requirements.



# Support Employee Health

Your people are your most important asset. Employee resilience is essential to business resilience.

## MENTAL HEALTH TIPS

- Listen, validate, and address employees' concerns about returning to work.
- Normalize talking about mental health in the workplace.
- Train managers to recognize warning signs of mental distress and refer employees to resources.
- Invest in and promote quality mental health benefits.
- Implement policies to support work-life balance.
- Build work systems that promote worker autonomy and flexibility.
- Create programs to foster worker connectivity.
- Challenge your insurance providers to add or enhance mental health offerings. Promote the available support internally and streamline the process for employees to access it.

## PHYSICAL HEALTH TIPS

- Provide paid sick leave so workers can stay home when they feel unwell and quarantine or isolate per CDC guidance in case of exposure to COVID-19 or a positive test.
- Explore policies to support employees impacted by Long COVID. Long COVID symptoms may qualify as protected disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act.
  - Promote vaccines. Vaccinations protect against Long COVID, and may reduce symptoms for those who get vaccinated after infection.
  - Support access to treatment. Early antiviral use after infection can reduce risk of long COVID.
  - Consider how you can help employees manage their symptoms as they return to work.
- Promote annual flu shots and vaccination for infectious diseases beyond COVID-19.
- Consider investing in an employee wellness program.



# Support Employee Well-Being

Look beyond the workplace  
to secure the health of your  
employees.

## COMMUNITY WELLNESS TIPS

- Your employees and their families' health is strongly influenced by the health of their community. Reach out to your local public health department to understand community health challenges.
- Explore targeted areas of investment to improve community health.

## FINANCIAL WELLNESS TIPS

- Finances are the top cause of employee stress, with 42% of full time employees struggling to meet [monthly expenses](#) in 2021. Financial wellness starts with competitive, equitable, and livable wages.
- Enhance financial wellness through benefits that support financial stability and long term health, such as quality health insurance, retirement benefits, tuition stipends or loan forgiveness, and access to financial planning programs.

## EQUITABLE SUPPORT TIPS

- Provide flexible work arrangements as needed for immunocompromised workers, and evaluate your workplace compliance with the American Disability Act.
- Consider establishing Employee Resource Groups or affinity groups to establish community, create safe listening environments, and meet the unique and diverse needs of your workers.
- Consider expanding family-friendly benefits such as flexible work schedules, paid sick leave for family care, elder care networks, or child care subsidies to support working caregivers.

# SECTION 3

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES



# HEALTH ACTION

## ALLIANCE RESOURCES

### Vetted, free resources for your company:

- [Quick Start Guide for Employers on COVID-19 Vaccines](#)
- [Manager's Conversation Guide](#)
- [Navigating Difficult Conversations](#)
- [Sample COVID-19 Workplace Vaccination Policy](#)
- [Decision Tool for Business Leaders](#)
- [Tips to Support Anxious Employees Returning to the Office](#)
- [Pandemic Stress and Anxiety: Resources for Employees and Workers](#)
- [Fact Sheet: Healthier Businesses Start with Healthier Communities](#)
- [Flu Season Employer Toolkit](#)



Find more at [\*\*healthaction.org\*\*](https://healthaction.org)

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## Vetted, free resources for your company:

- [CDC Ventilation in Buildings](#)
- [Upper-room UVGI systems](#)
- [Guidance for Building Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [How to Get Your At-Home COVID-19 Test for Free](#)
- [Seven Ways Businesses Can Align with Public Health](#)







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