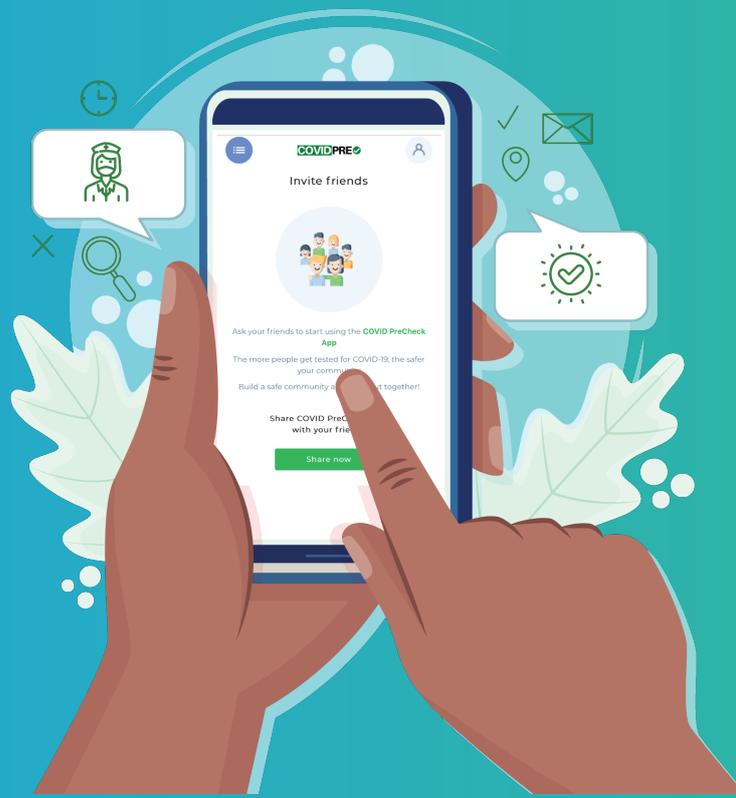


7 Step Guide to Return to **Work Safely**

For Human Resources and
Information Technology Executives



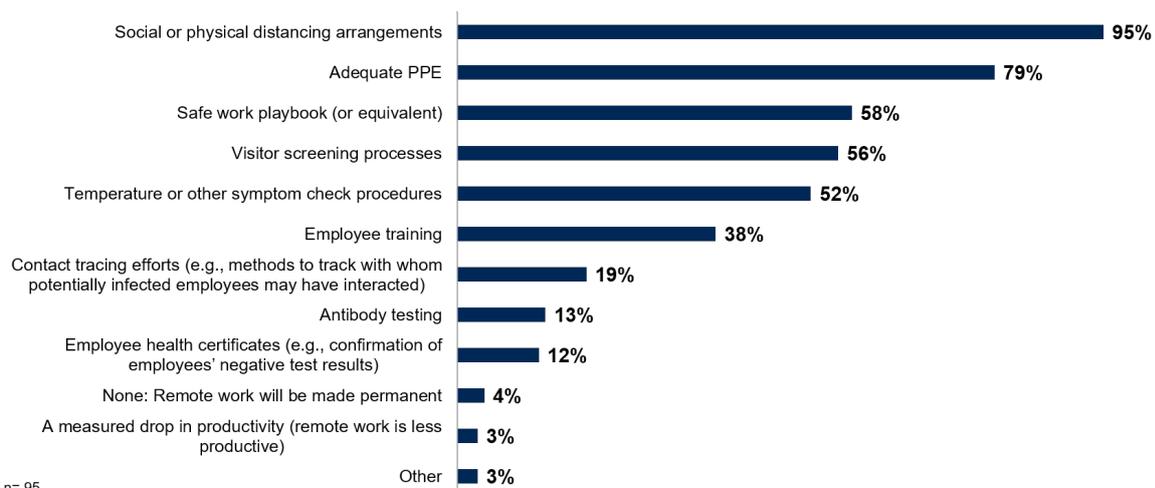
As employees start returning to work, it's not going to be simply a return to the old ways of doing business. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a new environment and a new set of constraints and for organizations to reengage with employees, customers, suppliers, and partners. However, this also presents opportunities to reinvent their workplaces. It is clear that a mix of technology, local regulations, and subjective factors like employee sentiment will play big roles in reopening decisions. In fact, the biggest challenge organizations are likely to face is in accommodating and balancing the diverse expectations of the returning workforce.

This guide will cover the essential steps and tools that HR teams and management need to consider when creating a safe, efficient, and effective reopening plan.

Return to Workplace Standards

Percentage of Legal Leaders Selecting

What must be in place before returning newly remote or furloughed workers to work sites? (Select all that apply)



n= 95
Source: Gartner 27 April 2020 Emerging Issues Related to COVID-19 Webinar

Figure 1. (Source: Gartner, Inc: Decision Principles for the Return to the Workplace: 5 Companies Share Their Judgment Calls Published 18 June 2020 - ID G00728323)



1. Make returning-to-the-workplace decisions based on various sources of data including public health agencies and clearly articulate health and safety policies.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration have unveiled guidance to help employers in different industries bring employees and contractors back to work in a safe manner. The HR team will have to coordinate and monitor these guidelines that are frequently updated on CDC and OSHA websites. If the business is already using an HR portal, it should be updated regularly with changes in guidance from the CDC and OSHA. The HR team may have to coordinate with the legal department to work through the nuances of guidance and policies including state and local labor laws. Part of the issue here is that this is an ongoing education process. The HR team is responsible for collecting and evaluating information from different sources, then collaborating with different departments to make return-to-workspace decisions. As shown in Figure 1, 45% of the employees surveyed by Gartner indicated that employees want organizations to articulate clear office health and safety protocols.



2. Organize shifts and stagger employees' return to the workplace based on employee risk, comfort, and business priorities.

You will have to evaluate your business priorities to identify the critical roles that need to report to the workplace and balance those with employees who can work remotely. It is important to remember that some employees may have comorbidities that make them at high risk of contracting the virus. This is compounded by factors like the availability of public transportation and school closures that play an important role in determining which employees can and should return to work.

As shown in Figure 1, 56% of the employees surveyed by Gartner want organizations to make return-to-work dates flexible. To do this, it is clear that the HR department will have to analyze the data to understand employee circumstances. Based on the analysis, business leaders can prioritize the segments that return to work. While businesses can use an existing Workforce Management solution, it also presents an opportunity to start deploying integrated digital platforms that combine employees' health status with shift assignment and start date allocation.

For example, similar to a handicapped sticker or doctor's note, you can use the COVID PreCheck software to verify that an employee is at high risk by querying their status or scanning their QR-code on their phones. The QR-code serves as a doctor's digital note and the employee can use it inside the organization as well as outside the place of work.

3. Create protocols and policies for creating safe workspaces and use digital technologies to implement them.

37% of the employees surveyed by Gartner in Figure 1 indicated that they expect their employer to perform temperature checks at the office entrance. However, top public health officials have deemed temperature checks to be pointless. It is better to educate employees and allow building security staff to collect employee, customer, and visitor responses to symptoms and exposure risk surveys prior to entering your facility or worksite. As shown in Figure 2, with digital technologies such as COVID PreCheck, employees, customers, and visitors can complete self-assessment via a mobile app in under 30 seconds to determine who is safe to enter the facility and who requires further assessment.

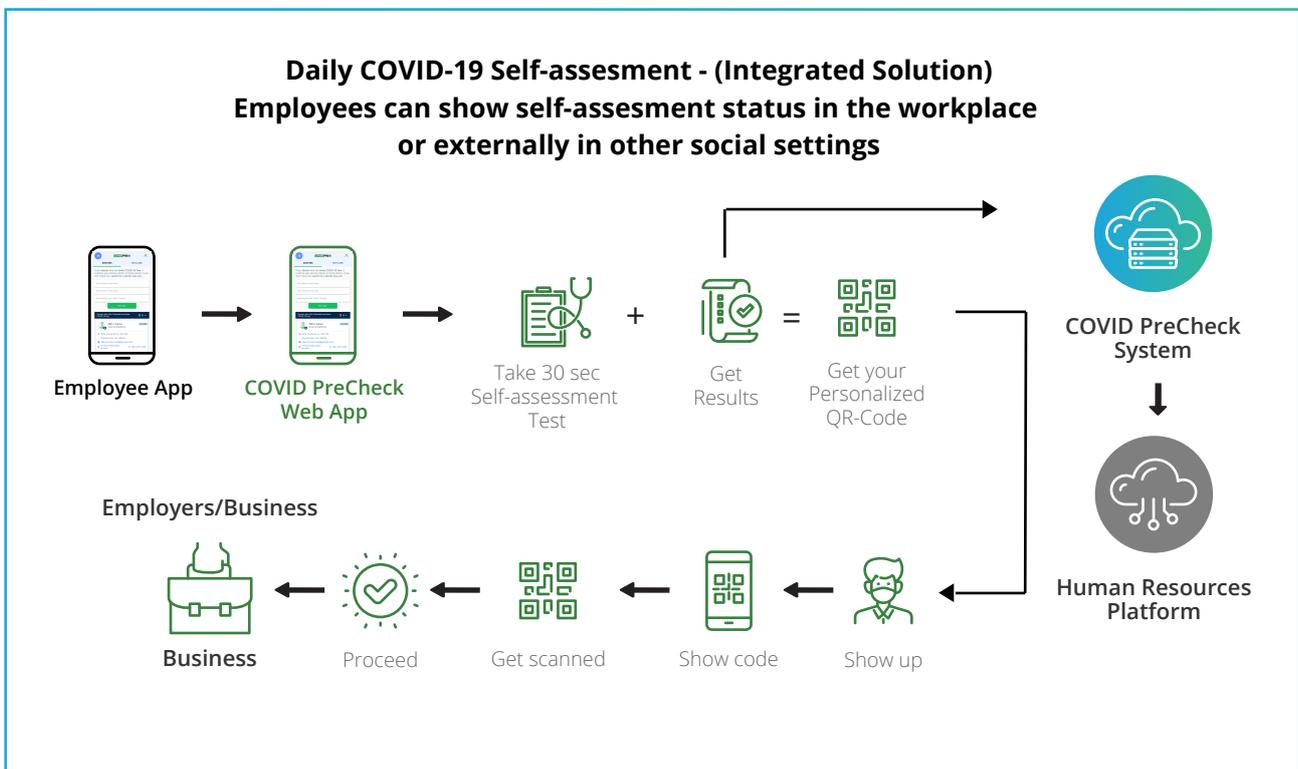


Figure 2.

By integrating COVID PreCheck with your existing Human Resources platform, you can eliminate the need for paper forms that slow down intake. An admin portal can help track staff who are screened out, as well as providing follow-up, support, and immediate insights on critical staffing impacts as well as back to work timelines. By implementing a new streamlined screening solution and eliminating costly and inefficient temperature checks, employees are empowered to closely monitor their personal health in support of the concerted efforts of the organization in creating safe workspaces.

In addition to screening protocols and policies, it is also important to promote good hygiene practices. These include keeping a running inventory of masks, wipes, and hand sanitizer and encouraging employees to use these as they return to work. As shown in Figure 1, over 50% of the employees surveyed expect their employers to provide these utilities as they reopen offices. Some organizations have already started conversations with real estate management leaders to increase cleaning service staff and housekeeping staff. Some have even secured a commitment to disinfect air conditioning vents regularly and keep them running in 'fresh air' mode.

Specifying and implementing social distancing measures such as limiting the number of employees in meeting rooms will also be critical as employees return to work. Some 40% of employees surveyed indicated that they expect their employer to redesign the office to allow more separation between employees as shown in Figure 1.

4. Provide assistance to employees who do get infected.

It is inevitable that some employees will come down with COVID-19 as they return to work. While this could impact the return-to-work effort executives believe is necessary to preserve productivity/company culture, it is important to highlight employee safety over business slowdown. If they show symptoms at work, appropriate protocols. However, it is not going to matter where they got infected. As a start, you need to make it extremely clear that Day 0 does not represent a return to normalcy. Employees under quarantine only get to come back to work after they meet the criteria to avoid self-isolation.

Transparency and communication are also paramount. Every employee should understand the reasoning behind any policies that you put forward, and there should be constant reminders why this is the case. Employees need to brace for a larger emphasis on safety and procedure. Your admin staff can help here by putting posters around the workplace to showcase best practices. One concern that is also coming up is discrimination or harassment of infected people returning to work. Be sure to remind your staff that there is zero tolerance for such behavior and that disciplinary action will soon follow.

5. Set protocols and guidelines to protect employee confidentiality.

Communication also needs to be balanced with employee confidentiality. If someone was to be infected in your office or job site or even display symptoms, you need a concrete plan in place

For example, an alert saying that “someone on the fourth floor tested positive,” keeps people informed while respecting individual privacy. You should make sure managers have a designated contact to report cases, and that you limit the number of people who know the name of infected staff members. Designate parts of the building as quarantine areas in the event of an emergency.

6. Tap into the voice of employees to understand their challenges and provide them the right support.

Similar to infection, it's also inevitable that there are going to be iterations and improvements to any reopening policies. What's important is that you have a plan in place to solicit employee feedback (short surveys, etc.) as well as provide support to employees dealing with tangential issues.

For example, many experts have predicted a mental health crisis running right alongside this existing crisis. As a result, managers need guidance on how to address the stigma of mental health issues like depression. Make sure your managers can identify warning signs of suicidal or other dangerous behavior.

One area that can help with employee morale is professional development, to show your team there are still ways to advance and improve their station. Being able to provide career development advice helps keep employees satisfied and focused in uncertain times.

7. Prepare for future closures and remote-working with minimal disruptions.

Resurgences of COVID-19 are not only possible but also expected by many public health experts. Subsequent to the initial response to the COVID-19 outbreak, businesses will have to plan and prepare their employees for future occurrences of this and similar public health threats. Companies will very likely need to plan for almost another year of public health measures controlling workplace decisions regarding health and hygiene. This is where proactive measures play a major role in preparedness. Now, every business has both government guidance and personal experience to work with moving forward.

Similarly, lessons learned from implementing remote work/communication rapidly should become part of the organizational memory. These measures should be well reviewed and well documented so you can revisit these at a moment's notice.



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