# **HARC's Guide on**
Managing the Shift from Working from Home to Working in the Office

A lot has changed in the past year and as employers start to reopen their offices, there are many things to consider. From safety guidelines, to the anxiety of returning to in-person meetings, to establishing new routines, transitioning back to work after the pandemic may not be easy. Work as we know it has changed drastically during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some workers have been working on the front-lines the entire time, while others transitioned to working from home. Many who've been working remotely over the past year are now being asked to return to their offices. This shift may be difficult for both employees and employers to manage. As such, HARC has created this infographic to help both employers and employees manage the transition.
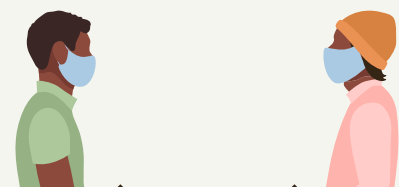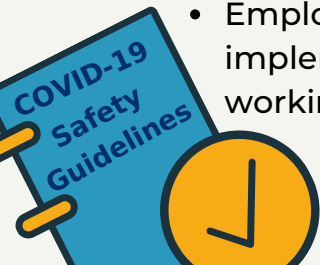
For Employers

Based on a survey by KPMG (Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler, a leading professional services firm) almost half, 45%, of global CEOs do not expect to see a return to a 'normal' course of business until sometime in 2022.[1]

45%
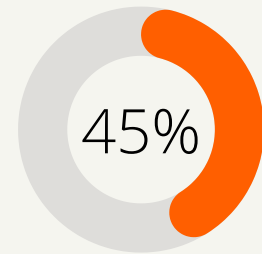
This demonstrates that both employers and employees will be facing challenges while transitioning to in-person work. Below are some things to consider as an employer:

- Grant paid time off for employees to get vaccinated.[2] Businesses with less than 500 employees may be eligible for tax credits under the American Rescue Plan if they provide paid time off for employees who decide to receive the vaccine.[3]

- Implement physical distancing in all communal work areas.[2] This protects unvaccinated workers and/or those who may have at-risk family members at home.

- Educate workers and communicate COVID-19 policies and procedures.[2] It is important that workers know the guidelines and whom to contact with questions or concerns about workplace safety and health. Consider setting up an anonymous process for workers to voice concerns related to COVID-19 safety measures. For example, HARC has a shared document where staff members may anonymously type and voice any concerns they may have.

- Employers are also encouraged to discuss with their employees for implementing new norms in the work space such as the hybridization of working both remotely and on-site task.

COVID-19 Safety Guidelines

For Employees
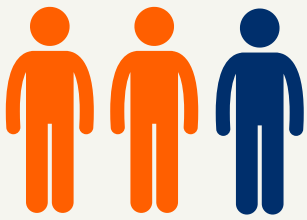
It is normal to have doubts, anxiety, or mixed feelings about returning back to in-person work. According to a survey of 1,000 workers conducted by Envoy in mid-February, two out of three workers say they're worried about the transition.[4] To reduce your worries and ease your transition, consider the following tips:[2]

- Identify opportunities to get vaccinated. Ask your employer about opportunities for paid leave to get vaccinated and recover from any side effects.

- If you are not vaccinated or have at-risk family members at home, continue practicing social distancing and communicate with your employer that you are still social distancing.

- Participate in any training offered by your employer regarding COVID-19 policies. Learn how rooms are ventilated effectively and notify the building manager if you see vents that are clogged, dirty, or blocked by furniture.

- Take steps to manage your anxiety.[5] Over the past year, people have been social distancing and may have lost practice in daily in-person interactions. It is normal to feel anxious in being around people or anxious about possibly contracting COVID-19. Some things that may help lower this anxiety and stress include:
    - Refresh or clean up your work space. A clean and organized environment is good for your mental health and can help lower stress levels. Bringing a plant to work may also help. Research indicates that plants help reduce stress levels at the office and increase productivity by 15%.[6]

    - Establish a new work schedule that works for you.[5] Our routines have shifted immensely during the pandemic so prior to returning to the office, work on establishing a routine bed time. Getting enough sleep helps reduce stress and anxiety.
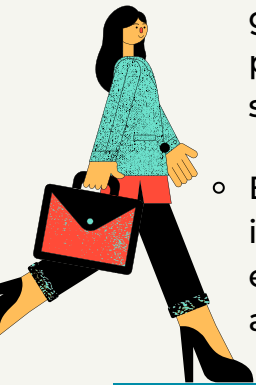
For Everyone: Communication Matters

Going back to the office post-pandemic will not be the same as it used to be. A February survey revealed that nearly half of employees (48%) say they would like a hybrid work model, where they work some days remotely and some days from the office.[4]

As an employer, it is important to communicate with employees and take into consideration how they feel about returning to the office. With new COVID-19 variant updates, it may be tough for some employees to feel comfortable in the office. As an employee, it is crucial to communicate any concerns or worries with employers. The goal is to find a middle ground that works for both parties.

Legal Considerations for Employers and Employees

As the employees are slowly transitioning from remote work into on-site work, the employers may have some concerns in regards to their employees vaccination status.

Although employers are not prohibited from mandating vaccination for their employees, there are few legal restrictions to consider.[8]

- Employers must provide reasonable accommodation to qualified employees with disability, under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

- Employers must provide reasonable accommodation to employees' sincerely held religious belief, under the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1994.

- Employers follow the Guidance from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to cautiously screen for employee's vaccination status, and avoid disabilities-related inquiries.

- Employers must provide compensated work time for their employees to receive work-directed vaccination, under the federal law.
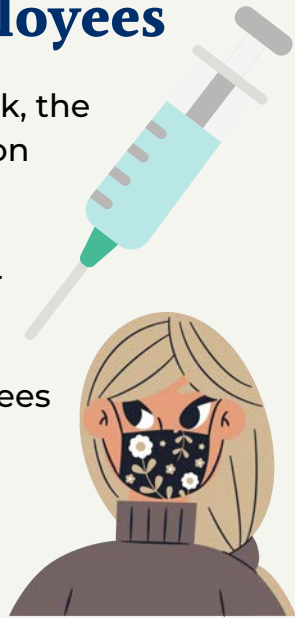
According to EEOC, employees, with all accommodations considered, may be banned from the workplace if they refused to get vaccinated, though the employers are encouraged to work with their employees to find a better solution.[9]

Due to the severity of the pandemic, employers may take employees' temperature under the recognition of CDC and state/local health authorities.

For more legal information, please visit: https://www.eeoc.gov/wysk/what-you-should-know-about-covid-19-and-ada-rehabilitation-act-and-other-eeo-laws#G

For Employees

Still confused about what your employer can mandate at work? You may contact Cal/OSHA if you have any work-related health and safety concerns/complaints such working with hazards or inadequate guidelines.

To find local Cal/OSHA Enforcement District Office, go to www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/Complaint.htm

To find information on worker's rights, please visit: https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/documents/health-and-safety-rights-for-workers.pdf

For more information, please visit the Cal/OSHA website: www.dir.ca.gov/dosh

Protective Measures at Work

While reshaping personal and professional life is crucial for the transition, it is also important to continue practicing existing public health safety guidelines. Here are some reminders of safety tips recommended by CDC:[7]

- Wear a mask
  - Wearing a mask in public/shared spaces helps prevent the spread of the virus, especially when social distancing is not available. It is recommended to continue wearing a mask even if you are vaccinated.

6 ft
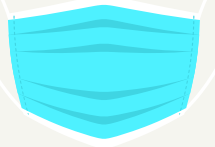
- Wash your hands often
  - Frequently wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
  - Use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if water and soap are not available.

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects such as door knobs, tables, key boards, faucets.

- Social distancing in shared spaces
  - Stay at least 6 feet with other colleagues at work
  - Some people without symptoms may be able to spread the virus
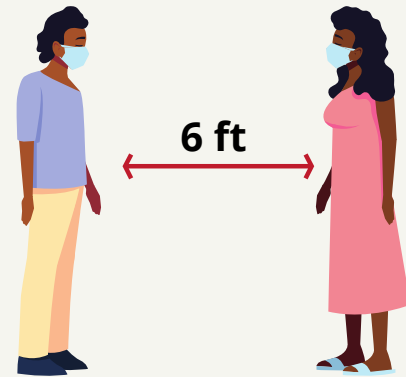
- Cover your coughs and sneezes
  - If you are wearing a mask, you can cough into the mask and dispose the mask with a new mask.
  - If you are not wearing a mask, cover with a tissue or your elbow.
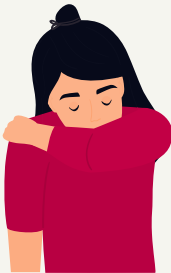
For Everyone: Safety & Health First

Collaborative

The health and safety of the workforce should be everyone's top priority as employees are counting on their companies to help them get back to work safely. As an individual, one should monitor their health daily and be alert for COVID-19 symptoms, such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath. It is important for employers and employees to communicate, show compassion and support each other during this unique time. Together, we can all make this transition to work more comfortable.

SOURCES:

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2. https://www.osha.gov/coronavirus/safework
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4. https://envoy.com/blog/envoy-survey-finds-employees-want-companies-to-embrace-hybrid-work-and-mandate-covid-vaccines/
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For more information, visit HARCdata.org

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