# Bring Employees Back to the Workplace Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic Webinar FAQ

For more information, visit McLean & Company’s [COVID-19 Resource Center](https://hr.mcleanco.com/covid) and book a call with one of our analysts. Our research toolkit, *Adapt Your Onboarding Process to a Virtual Environment* can be downloaded [here](https://www.infotech.com/research/ss/adapt-your-onboarding-process-to-a-virtual-environment).

**McLean & Company Phone Numbers:**

* Toll-Free: 1-877-281-0480
* International: +1-519-936-2659

**Please note:** *Any questions received during the webinar that are jurisdiction-specific will not be covered in this FAQ document. This includes questions on topics such as duty to accommodate, contact tracing, and other COVID-19 specific protocols, right of refusal, etc. Please consult your local public health authority and/or your legal counsel for answers to such questions.*

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| **Question** | **Answer** |
| What does the organization do with employees who have kids if the schools and daycares remain closed?  | There are two key things organizations should keep in mind when supporting employees who have caregiving responsibilities. First, organizations need to make sure they’re communicating with employees early. Early communication provides employees time to make childcare arrangements or to notify the organization of this barrier to returning to the workplace so individual accommodations can be determined. Secondly, organizations may want to consider implementing additional policies to support employees who have caregiving responsibilities. Use McLean & Company’s [*Essential COVID-19 Child Care Policy for Every Organization*](https://www.infotech.com/research/ss/the-essential-covid-19-child-care-policy-for-every-organization-yesterday-3d076131-d26c-4fbf-a350-9c099416165b)blueprint to create a policy to support both the employees and the organization’s needs.  |
| How do we handle physical distancing in the office?  | Physical distancing in the office will depend on the work environment. To start, organizations should: * Identify if the office space is in a multi-tenant space or if they are the only organization in the building. In a multi-tenant space, the organization will have to coordinate physical distancing measures with their neighbors and building management (e.g. determining how elevators or staircases will be used, determining how common spaces are used in the building).
* Assess the physical office environment. Questions to ask include, “are employees sharing desks?”, “do we have meeting spaces or other common spaces?”
	+ Organizations may have to close common spaces or avoid in-person meetings, especially in small confined spaces.
	+ In an open-space environment, employees may need to be assigned seating.
	+ Cleaning protocol will need to be put in place to ensure all common surfaces are kept clean.
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| Where do we find information about the government and public health regulations for the locations where we operate? | Work with general counsel and your organization’s health and safety specialist to determine which government and public health regulations apply to the locations where you operate. For the most accurate and up-to-date information, it’s important to go right to the source. To start identifying what regulations might apply, ask the following questions to identify the jurisdiction you are operating in.* What country do we operate in?
* What state, province, or territory do we operate in?
* What city do we operate in?

By identifying your operating jurisdiction, you can narrow down the sources to the public and government health authorities in this area. For many, the information is being updated daily on government and public health websites. Some examples of sources for employers include: * [The World Health Organization](https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/09-03-2020-covid-19-occupational-health)
* [The Center for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/businesses-employers.html)
* [The Occupational Safety and Health Administration](https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/) (US)
* [FEMA](https://www.fema.gov/coronavirus)
* [Public Health Canada](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/risk-informed-decision-making-workplaces-businesses-covid-19-pandemic.html)
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| Should we supply PPE?  | Organizational requirements for supplying PPE will differ from region to region and from industry to industry. Please review the public health and government requirements for your location. Some organizations or roles will be mandated to supply employees with PPE. It is important to work with legal counsel and the organization’s health and safety specialists to determine requirements around providing PPE and how PPE will be supplied based on the public health and government requirements for the locations you are operating within. Additionally, organizations will need to assess each role to understand what kind of PPE is required. For example, PPE needs for cashiers will differ from the needs of cleaners.  |
| How should we address being a tenant in the building?  | For organizations that are a tenant in the building, it is important to work with facilities and building management. Communicating the COVID-19 protocols will be important. By collaborating, the organization and their partners can coordinate safety plans as employees move throughout the space. Things to discuss include how to manage the flow of people in and out of the building to allow for physical distancing. Other items to discuss are how to manage physical distancing in elevators, hallways, common spaces, and restrooms, as well as details about increased sanitizing.  |
| How do we determine who still works remotely?  | Organizations will need to assess the work unit and the specific employee segments within the work unit to determine who can work remotely. McLean & Company suggests assessing work units for two things. The first is the level of restrictions impacting the work unit. This would require the organization to look at government and public health mandates.The second is the likelihood of success and profitability for the work unit. This would require the organization to assess the work unit and determine if in-person interactions are required or if the role can continue to work remotely.  |
| Are there any best practices for checking in with employees once the plan starts?  | The team leading the return to the workplace plan should be checking in with employees on a regular basis. This is especially important for those who are working in the physical environment. When the organization checks in with the employees, they should ask:* Are the protocols working (do they feel safe and are they productive)?
* Do they have the resources and tools to support them in the physical workplace?

Organizations can leverage [McLean & Company’s Pandemic Engagement Pulse Check](https://hr.mcleanco.com/hr-diagnostics/pep-check) to help them gather this feedback from employees.  |
| How should organizations approach training employees?  | It’s important that organizations select training that is specific to their needs and return to the workplace plan. Training that the organization should consider includes: * Training around the specific PPE material
* Training around any cleaning chemicals being introduced to the work environment
* Training around changes to work processes

Training formats the organization can look into include:* Webinars
* eLearning modules
* Job aids that are sent and posted around the physical work environment

Where possible, work with vendors to see if they have training or job aids available to support the use of their products and services.  |
| What tools are companies using to assist with these processes besides Excel and spreadsheets?  | There are many different vendors offering various applications and software to help organizations manage through the pandemic. While the applications are continuously evolving as the situation unfolds, here is a brief snapshot of some technology that is currently available: * Physical distancing and contact tracing software. Features differ between vendors, but generally speaking, this software does the following:
	+ Tracks who comes into contact with each other and alerts employees.
		- The software can be installed on cellphones or on external devices worn on lanyards or as a bracelet that beep or vibrate when employees come within six feet of one another.
	+ Tracks problem areas (or “hot spots”) that need to be addressed.
	+ Uses this information for contract tracing if an outbreak occurs.
* Floorplan software to optimize the utilization of your physical work environment while maintaining physical distancing requirements.
* Virtual collaboration and communication software.
* Virtual learning software.
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| Would you consider a staggered return to the work workforce/ work unit to start? (Half days or every other day, where people still work a portion of their time from home.)  | A staggered return to work is a great place for organizations to start. A staggered return looks at gradually returning the workforce to the physical work environment, unit by unit. There are a number of ways an organization can stagger the return to the workplace: * Organizations can focus on deploying only those work units who need to be in the physical workplace (e.g. distribution center work units, facilities management work units). This allows the organization to focus on their priorities.
* Alternatively, organizations can create rotating work groups. This is where specific employee groups will return to the physical work environment only on days or times that is assigned to them. This allows the organization to limit and control the physical interactions and number of employees in the work environment.
* If organizations want to have half days where employees work a portion of the time from home, they will want to consider focusing on those tasks and duties that need to take place in the physical workplace to ensure that the employee’s productivity is not limited by the change in environments during the day. Organizations will also want to consider the amount of travel required when determining the effectiveness of half days (e.g. commute times, available transit).
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| How do we access the catalog? | You can access the *Idea Catalog: Bring Employees to the Workplace* on our website using this [link](https://www.infotech.com/research/idea-catalog-bring-employees-to-the-workplace).  |
| How do you prepare for employees that need to go to customer sites? What if the customer is open sooner than our company? Any protocols to follow before sending employees to customer sites? | For many organizations, their external partners may be open sooner than they are. This may then require the organization to deploy employees or work units to the partners where they provide support. When assessing the physical work environment, organizations should be including customer sites and in doing so, they should partner with their customers to determine how their employees will travel to and function in the customer’s location. Some organizations are implementing visitor policies that may impact how your employees travel to the customer site. Specific health and safety guidelines will depend on the jurisdiction, so it is important that the organization identify the location that the employee is traveling to as well. Some protocols for organizations to consider include: * Providing employees with instructions from the customer and the organization as to how they will enter and function in the customer site.
* Providing employees with a PPE supply to keep them safe in the customer site.
* Providing employees with training as to how to use PPE or how to sanitize any tools they are using at customer sites.
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| How do you address employees who want to come back to work but might not be in one of the first work segments identified as needing to go back? | Communication will be really important here. Giving employees a high-level overview of the plans for returning to the workplace and general timing can be helpful in setting expectations. Explain who is returning to the workplace and when and how employees will be kept informed.You may also want to consider getting volunteers to test out return-to-work protocols. This will allow employees who want to return to the office sooner the chance to do so. If you can meet the public health and government requirements, for example, physical distancing requirements, and there is no impact to how the work gets done, then you may want to consider allowing employees who are interested to come back to the physical work environment. |
| How do we deal with employees who express reluctance, fear, or anxiety about going back to the office and question why they need to go back to the office when they are able to complete their work from home? | The first step is to have a conversation with them, to dig into the cause of their reluctance: are they in a vulnerable group or do they live with someone who is? Do they have childcare or eldercare responsibilities that would prevent them from coming in? Are they worried about how they will get to and from work? Encourage them to speak with their manager and work with the manager and the employee to discuss individual accommodation options.Next, it is important to clearly communicate to employees the precautions the organization is taking and the protocols being put in place to ensure they are returning to a safe workplace. Communicate early and often to help employees prepare themselves for the return. Provide information about resources available to support employees such as employee assistance programs.  |
| Do you have pulse surveys included in your COVID-19 resource library?  | We do! Our [Pandemic Engagement Pulse Survey](https://hr.mcleanco.com/hr-diagnostics/pep-check) allows organizations to gather feedback from employees to ensure that they're responding in a meaningful way. No organization is an expert in pandemic response, and employees can provide information on situations that HR may not have anticipated. |
| For teams working remotely now, how do you recommend deciding who comes to the office versus who may remain remote? Should compensation be adjusted for those coming to the office (e.g. greater commute time, added costs regarding personal safety)? | Please refer to the answer above for the question “How do we determine who still works remotely?”McLean & Company is currently working on a research project focused on the more permanent WFH options and organizational considerations in this phase of the pandemic, and beyond. Please check back to our site for this publication.  |
| Should we be planning for a second wave of COVID-19 in the plan? | Prepare to be iterative. Without a vaccine, organizations must be prepared for rolling government lockdowns as cases of COVID-19 rise and fall. The return to the workplace deployment plan needs to be flexible to adopt new changes as the COVID-19 pandemic evolves. Revisit the scenarios in the storyboard to help plan the iterations.Align the deployment plan with the business continuity plan to ensure that it meets the organization’s needs. |

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