

Returning to Work After COVID-19: Keep a proper “Social Distance!”



There is a lot to think about when returning to work after a furlough. “Social distancing” is going to be a challenge. Can you keep your time at work at a proper “social distance?” Here are some things to talk with your employer about if you don't see them being addressed:

Will social distancing be practiced? We all know that COVID-19 is primarily transmitted through close person-to-person contact with respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. That's why social distancing is one of the best measures to limit its spread. Whenever possible, employers should ensure that workers can maintain a 6-foot distance from one another, which could mean physically moving furniture or desks to separate workstations, operating at a reduced capacity, or staggering shifts to decrease the number of people who are in the workplace at one time.

What other precautions will be in place?

There is some evidence that in certain situations, a 6-foot distance on its own may not be enough to prevent transmission indoors, including if an infected person is breathing heavily, coughing, or sneezing. Physical barriers, such as plastic dividers, are therefore a good supplement to social distancing for protecting employees from coming into contact with the coronavirus. They provide a second line of protection that goes beyond simply relying on individual compliance.

It's also believed that COVID-19 can be transmitted through contaminated surfaces. Therefore, it's important that companies also regularly disinfect communal areas and surfaces. CDC guidance recommends that “surfaces frequently touched by multiple people, such as door handles, desks, phones, light switches, and faucets, should be cleaned and disinfected at least daily.” Ideally, employers should have someone assigned to wipe down frequently touched surfaces with some type of antiseptic wipe. Cleanings should occur in the morning, mid-afternoon, and then again before people leave.

What happens if an employee has COVID-19 or shows symptoms?

Some companies may choose to screen employees before they enter the building, asking about symptoms like chills and fever—or physically taking workers' temperatures. Those who are presenting symptoms should be told to stay home, or sent home. This process is not foolproof as research has shown that people who don't have symptoms can still spread the virus to others. If workers fall ill, the CDC recommends they stay home until at least three days have passed since recovery and at least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared. For workers who have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19, the agency advises they remain at home and practice social distancing for 14 days.

If you feel anxious about returning to work, call a Best Care EAP counselor. This is not an easy time for any of us, ask for help. **All sessions with a BCEAP counselor are FREE and CONFIDENTIAL.** The COVID counseling help line is available 24/7, call (800) 801-4182.