



BOSTON COLLEGE
Center for Work & Family
CARROLL SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

Return to Work post COVID-19

April 2020

[Guidelines: Opening Up America Again](#) (4/16/20)

- Proposed state or regional gating criteria (satisfy before proceeding to phased opening)
 - Symptoms: Downward trajectory of influenza-like illnesses reported within a 14-day period AND downward trajectory of covid-like syndromic cases reported within a 14-day period
 - Cases: Downward trajectory of documented cases within a 14-day period OR downward trajectory of positive tests as a percent of total tests within a 14-day period (flat or increasing volume of tests)
 - Hospitals: Treat all patients without crisis care AND robust testing program in place for at-risk healthcare workers, including emergency antibody testing
- Guidelines for all phases: Individuals
 - Continue to practice good hygiene
 - Continue to adhere to state and local guidance as well as complementary CDC guidance, particularly with respect to face coverings
 - People who feel sick should stay home. Do not go to work or school, and contact and follow the advice of your medical provider
- Guidelines for all phases: Employers
 - Develop and implement appropriate policies, in accordance with Federal, State, and local regulations and guidance, and informed by industry best practices, regarding:
 - Social distancing and protective equipment
 - Temperature checks
 - Testing, isolating, and contact tracing
 - Sanitation
 - Use and disinfection of common and high traffic areas
 - Business travel
 - Monitor workforce for indicative symptoms. Do not allow symptomatic people to physically return to work until cleared by a medical provider.
 - Develop and implement policies and procedures for workforce contact tracing following employee COVID+ test
- **Phase 1: Employers**
 - Continue to encourage telework where possible
 - If possible, return to work in phases
 - Close common areas where people are likely to congregate and interact, or enforce strict social distancing protocols

- Minimize non-essential travel and adhere to CDC guidelines regarding isolation following travel
- Strongly consider accommodations for personnel who are members of a vulnerable population
- **Phase 2: Employers**
 - Continue to encourage telework where possible
 - Close common areas where personnel are likely to congregate and interact, or enforce moderate social distancing protocols
 - Non-essential travel can resume
 - Strongly consider special accommodations for personnel who are members of a vulnerable population
- **Phase 3: Employers**
 - Resume unrestricted staffing of worksites

Resources from the US Chamber of Commerce

Suzanne Clark, the head of the US Chamber of Commerce, shared a press release and letter to member organizations about considerations for re-opening. These resources outline several health screening, safety, and liability implications.

- [Press Release](#) (4/13/20)
 - The U.S. Chamber of Commerce announced the "Path Forward" program, an initiative that will address how Americans and businesses can return to work safely, successfully, and sustainably.
 - The program includes a comprehensive framework of considerations, an event series that will feature diverse viewpoints from the public and private sectors, and recommendations on the practices and policies to begin a phased process on returning Americans to work.
- [Letter to Members](#) (4/13/20)
 - This letter to members of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce from President Suzanne Clark. It outlines the following aspects that will be a necessary part of the implementation of a national return to work plan:
 - **Essential services and resources**
 - General health screenings: The CDC has recommended that critical infrastructure employers screen certain exposed employees for temperature. This could extend to cover all employees and potentially customers.
 - COVID-19 Testing: To the extent that return to work will be based on testing for the virus or antibodies, there will need to be sufficient testing capacity and access, as well as decisions as to who will pay for them, administer them, and check results.
 - Personal Protective Equipment: If widespread use of PPE is recommended, there will need to be clarity on who will provide it if there are shortages.

- Transportation: Staggered worktimes could help reduce density on public transit, but transit systems may require financial assistance to operate at excess capacity.
- Childcare: Many childcare providers currently operating in the U.S. are for children of essential workers, and they've needed to implement public health recommendations, like lower teacher-child ratios. Financial assistance may be needed for childcare providers to maintain social distancing and allow other parents to return to work.
- **Resolution of regulatory and legal liability issues**
 - Health privacy: Laws that are meant to maximize individuals' health privacy may come into conflict with potential requirements for employers to verify employees' COVID-19 status or vulnerability.
 - Discrimination claims: Employers who conduct medical or risk-based reopening (with factors like age or underlying health conditions) may face liability under anti-discrimination rules. There needs to be clear guidance as to what practices are acceptable in conducting a medically-based or risk-based reopening.
 - Safe workplace requirements: OSHA typically requires employers to be responsible for providing PPE if it's required in the workplace, but this won't be possible if it's required in all workplaces. The government should clarify employers' responsibility to provide PPE in this situation.
 - Other liability issues, including employment practices, exposure liability, and medical liability, can be found in the letter.
- **Support for businesses and individuals**
 - Federal programs to support employers and individuals will need to be modified to assist businesses and individuals that remain under distress.
 - Businesses that rely on business, trade show, and personal travel may be greatly reduced as some social distancing guidelines continue. These businesses may need bridge assistance to allow them to remain open.
 - Unless there is a widely available vaccine or treatment, some high-risk individuals will not be able to return to work. This may require an extension of regular unemployment insurance or creation of a new "high risk" unemployment insurance system.
- [Blog Post](#)
- [Path Forward](#)
 - This is a new virtual series from the US Chamber of Commerce that will focus on many of the challenges we have to overcome before America can return to work. It aims to help business and community leaders get answers as they develop responsible business reopening strategies.

- Topics include testing, barriers to reopening, industry-specific conversations, and more.
- *Path Forward* takes place every at 3pm EST every Monday and Thursday. Register [here](#).

[Biotechnology Research Report](#) (Morgan Stanley, 4/3/20)

- They predict social distancing reductions will start in June as testing becomes widely available and hospital capacity increases, but expect varying levels of social distancing will be in place until a vaccine is widely available in 2021.
- The U.S. will likely experience two peaks: one for the coastal region and one for the interior. They predict that the ultimate U.S. peak will be in mid-May.
- They believe 3 key criteria must be met for governors to relax social distancing:
 - A peak in new cases and a peak in cumulative mortality rates must both occur.
 - States will need to have appropriate public health infrastructure and testing capacity to allow for surveillance of any new hot spots.
 - Serology testing, to see who is immune to the virus, will need to be pervasive, which they believe will take until June.
- Coming back to work will happen in stages with reduced capacity in the office. They believe those who have recovered from the virus and the young and healthy will be able to return first, and foresee a maximum of 50% of employees allowed in the office during the summer months. A new wave of infections should also be expected as early as this fall, with varying levels of social distancing turned on and off.
- Drug antibody and antiviral therapies, with data starting in April, are the only opportunity to start things up more quickly prior to a vaccine.
- Key data points from China can provide a benchmark for resuming activities, but the U.S. may lag behind China for several reasons.
- Points to consider re: how long it will take to get back to work and resume economic activity
 - It is unlikely that the President can force states to abandon or loosen quarantine orders.
 - Local officials are more likely to respond to facts on the ground than messaging in the White House as they pay attention to things like hospital capacity, ventilators, etc. in their state and make decisions on guidelines.
 - States run the risk of greater fiscal and political strain by underreacting. Mitigation measures to deal with spread are costly. Therefore, they predict states will play it safe and order social distancing until sufficient healthcare infrastructure is in place to mitigate risk.

[American Enterprise Institute Report](#)

When will this end? (excerpt from NYT in reference to report)

This is a difficult question, because a lot depends on [how well the virus is contained](#). A better question might be: "How will we know when to reopen the country?" In [an American Enterprise Institute report](#), Scott Gottlieb, Caitlin Rivers, Mark B. McClellan, Lauren Silvis and Crystal Watson [staked out four goal posts for recovery](#): Hospitals in the state must be able

to safely treat all patients requiring hospitalization, without resorting to crisis standards of care; the state needs to be able to at least test everyone who has symptoms; the state is able to conduct monitoring of confirmed cases and contacts; and there must be a sustained reduction in cases for at least 14 days.

- To move away from physical distancing as the primary tool for controlling future spread, we need:
 - Better data to identify areas of spread and the rate of exposure and immunity in the population
 - Improvements in state and local health care system capabilities, public-health infrastructure for early outbreak identification, case containment, and adequate medical supplies
 - Therapeutic, prophylactic, and preventive treatments and better-informed medical interventions that give us the tools to protect the most vulnerable people and help rescue those who may become sick.
- **Phases of response**
 - Phase I: slow the spread (current phase)
 - Phase II: State-by-state reopening
 - Individual states can move to Phase II when they are able to safely diagnose, treat, and isolate COVID-19 patients and their contacts.
 - Businesses and schools will be able to open, but some physical distancing measures and limits on gatherings will still need to be in place. Older adults and those with heightened risk or underlying conditions will need to limit their time in the community.
 - Phase III: Establish immunity protection and lift physical distancing.
 - Phase II measures like physical distancing can be lifted when safe and effective tools for mitigating risk are available, such as broad surveillance, therapeutics that can prevent serious illness, or a safe and effective vaccine.
 - Phase IV: Rebuild our readiness for the next pandemic.
 - Invest in research and development, expand public health infrastructure and workforce, and create clear governance structures to execute strong preparedness plans.

McKinsey reports

[COVID-19: Implications for Business](#)

In this note, we offer some of our latest insights on the COVID-19 pandemic, starting with a survey of the current epidemiology and the five dynamics leaders need to watch: the efficacy of the surge in critical care, the expansion of testing and other traditional approaches, the development of antibody testing, the unknown nature of immunity, and a wave of innovation that might produce treatments and vaccines.

We then highlight four of our many recently published articles, each designed to help senior executives think through the challenges of restarting economies. These and many more articles are available in our [collection](#) of coronavirus thinking. The outbreak is moving

quickly, and some perspectives here may soon be out of date. This article reflects our perspective as of April 13, 2020. We will update it regularly as the crisis evolves.

[Getting Ahead of the Next Stage of the Coronavirus Crisis](#)

The main takeaway of this report is that businesses need to develop Plan Ahead teams immediately (separate from their crisis management teams) and strategies over 5 time horizons. The bottom line is not *when* businesses will be re-opening (that will depend on the virus and government guidance/mandates and will vary by region), but what are the considerations around how work will look and how it can get done with employee safety the most important consideration.

Corporate Examples

[Patagonia Begins Cautious Reopening: Here's How](#)

- For the first phase, a skeleton crew workforce will oversee online order and return fulfillment. All retail locations, at present, remain closed to the public.
 - Patagonia will staff less than 20% of its original workforce before it begins to ramp up to normal operation.
 - The brand surveyed employees to see who was willing to come back to work and then vetted those to see if who either exhibited symptoms common to COVID-19 or had close contact with someone who did.
- The brand has undertaken additional measures, including:
 - Roughly one employee per 8,000-10,000 square feet and a 10-foot social distancing protocol.
 - Staggered shifts to limit the frequency of person-to-person interaction.
 - A cleaning crew to sweep work areas between shifts.
 - Directional flow for the buildings so that people don't need to pass each other during the day.
 - Providing gloves and non-medical cloth face masks to workers.
 - Stopping the use of shared time clocks.

[How the biggest companies in the world are preparing to bring back their workforce](#)

- Return to work will vary by **industry**:
 - "For some industries, such as Wall Street banks, ubiquitous testing is essential to bringing back their workforce to offices around the globe. For other industries, such as automakers, plans are already being made to open factories in a few weeks, with Fiat Chrysler and Tesla both saying they expect to begin production again on May 4. Retail is looking to China for guidance, studying consumer habits to adapt accordingly once stores open in the U.S."
- Back-to-work plans will also depend on **geography**:
 - Employers in rural areas and suburbs that saw fewer confirmed cases of coronavirus and resulting deaths will have an easier time convincing workers it's safe to return to the office than cities such as New York and New Orleans,

he said. The close quarters of city offices may add another barrier to urban employers whose workspaces are not built for social distancing.

- Hurdles will include:
 - Lack of available child care
 - Knowledge of the spread of the disease, which is reliant on testing
 - New cases will have to drop to nearly zero for the public to be comfortable returning to work and begin patronizing bars and restaurants
 - The legal and moral considerations of rushing people back to the office
 - The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [issued guidance](#) in mid-March, saying it's legal for companies to ask employees if they have symptoms of COVID-19, such as a cough or shortness of breath, and take their temperature.

Articles

[What Will Work-Life Balance Look Like After the Pandemic?](#) (HBR, 4/16/20)

[Employers: Imagining the New Normal](#) (LinkedIn 4/16/20)

Includes 5 elements of success for re-establishing your workforce: The Practical Set-up, Working from Home at scale?, People: Wellbeing and Purpose, Care for the Carers, Legacy

[Employers need to have a game plan now for returning to work after coronavirus](#)

(Employee Benefit News, 4/15/20)

[Are you ready for a post-COVID-19 world?](#) (Chief Learning Officer 4/14/20)

This article reviews five actions CLOs can take to re-engage and prepare their L&D teams and broader organizations.

[Governors team up to discuss reopening their states. Trump asserts "total" authority to overrule them.](#) (NYT, 4/13/20)

[Fauci outlines return to normal once coronavirus outbreak weakens](#) (NBC, 4/9/20)

Video interview and article in which Fauci addresses antibody testing and general timeline

[A New Normal with COVID-19: The Next Steps We Must Take](#) (ThinkGlobalHealth 4/6/20)

Emphasizes the need to continue to isolate at risk populations, includes some nice infographics

[A Common Sense Guide For Returning To The Post COVID-19 Workplace](#) (Work Design Magazine 4/2020)

This article provides guidelines for preparing the many aspects of the physical workplace