

GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS:

The Psychological Impact of Getting Back to Work Post Covid-19





Introduction

As you consider bringing your employees back to the workplace, as an employer you should be both focusing upon on the practicalities and from an employees' mental health and wellbeing perspective.

Your Workplace Reopening after Covid-19 Lockdown

After the Covid-19 lockdown, in planning for reopening you will need to create a “new normal” working culture as well as the need adopt new policies and procedures such as embedding a Stress at Work Policy and an Employee Wellbeing Policy (if these are not already in place), working practices, adaptations to your communication strategies and practices plus workload management to continue to manage your employees' wellbeing and mental health. You will also need to consider changes in employees' individual attitudes and focus upon continuing to protect your workforce, enhancing employee engagement and commitment to your organisation and productivity.

This guide and our [course on Returning to Work Post Covid-19](#) will help you to be forward-thinking in the systematic planning of your route to navigate a safe path

Returning safely - four areas to consider

Supporting your employees' safe return to workplaces may present various challenges such as social distancing restrictions which will still be in place and you will need to focus upon the 4 key returning to work safely areas of:-

1. Safe workplaces
2. Safe people
3. Safe equipment

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4. Safe systems

Safe Workplaces**The psychological impact of getting back to work post Covid-19**

Returning to work after several weeks under the Covid-19 lockdown is new territory for us all and can cause a differing range of emotions (disbelief, fear, anger) amongst your employees.

Whilst some employees will be glad to be heading back to their workplace, for others, they will do so fearfully. Each employee in their own way has been affected directly and indirectly by Covid-19 and will need empathy and understanding whilst navigating the process.

We strongly recommend you join [our webinar returning to Work Post Covid-19](#) to ensure you, your leaders and managers are fully aware of their key role in supporting your employees' return.

Your employees' wellbeing and mental health in their return to the workplace

Our guide outlines considerations and suggestions on how to support your employees' wellbeing and mental health in their phased return to the workplace.

Early research indicates Covid-19, lockdown and social distancing measures are likely to have had a significant impact upon employees' wellbeing and mental health. The extent of this impact is somewhat unknown at this current time.

This guide should be read in conjunction with our range of guidance and factsheets which contain information about wellbeing and mental health.

What action should employers take?

It is recognised some of your employees will not feel comfortable speaking about their poor wellbeing and/or poor mental health.

Employers therefore, will need to adapt or introduce a range interactions to support employees experiencing poor wellbeing and/or mental health as a result of COVID-19.

Measures will range from:

- Supporting employees to regain an effective work-life balance
- Addressing any fears or concerns about their return to work
- Introducing our Wellbeing Plan of Action (WPA)

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- Additional support being in place for those employees you are already aware have severe mental health conditions

Leaving your measures and actions until after your employees' have returned to the workplace, we suggest is not an option. Rather, be proactive and start to act now to put necessary support in place.

The law and mental health

As an employer, you have a duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of your workforce (your employees) and this includes their wellbeing and mental health.

Under health and safety legislation, you have the duty to assess the risk of stress-related poor mental health arising from work activities and take measures to control that risk.

You must follow the law (this only sets a minimum standard) therefore in going beyond this minimum standard will benefit your organisation improving:-

- Your organisational culture
- Employee engagement and commitment
- Reduced absence and presenteeism
- Employee retention

Actions you can take now

1. Continue to support the wellbeing and mental health of your employees who continue to work in essential and key worker roles
2. Continue to support employees who had to move to home working or have been furloughed and now start to return to your workplace
3. Plan and co-ordinate the process of returning to the workplace

You may wish to consider:

- Ensuring your managers are up-to-speed on the potential wellbeing and mental health implications of Covid-19
- Training your managers on their specific roles and responsibilities in relation to supporting employees
- Where your employees are returning to the workplace, consider a re-induction to ensure they are fully aware of your workplace health and safety changes i.e. distancing rules and procedures they must follow. This will help them feel connected, involved and engaged
- Commence a series of wellbeing and mental health awareness-raising activities and training events and work towards a culture where it is okay to talk about and seek support for wellbeing and mental health.
- Regularly communicate on the wellbeing and mental health support available in your organisation and have 'where to go for assistance' posters on your company noticeboards and intranet
- Early intervention when poor wellbeing and/or mental health presents itself

Supporting the return to the workplace

Wellbeing and mental health are complex and there will be no single solution for supporting employees in their return to the workplace.

Whilst some of your employees may have continued to be present in your workplace, for others their return will be phased and gradual, with those employees who can continuing to undertake a degree of homeworking.

Here are some potential interventions for your organisation to consider:

- Prepare and distribute a detailed communication plan covering practical issues such as the approach to maintaining social distancing and hygiene – this will help to reduce and manage employees’ concerns. Refer to the [Government guidance on COVID-secure workplaces](#) for the types of measures you should put in place.
- Continue to provide communication channel for employees to be able to maintain contact with their colleagues whilst working from home or social distancing.
- Ensure your managers receive training on wellbeing and mental health conditions including signs and symptoms.
- Provide mental health awareness training and activities for your workforce.
- Adapt your flexible working policies for a quicker decision made and increase opportunities to change or reduce hours.
- Ensure your senior leaders and managers include wellbeing and mental health messages to their team and how your organisation is promoting an inclusive and open culture
- Establish a network of internal wellbeing and mental health champions who can support employees and ensure they are appropriately trained

Looking for signs

Ensure your senior leaders and people managers are trained on the potential signs of poor wellbeing and mental health and how to handle a disclosure of a mental health condition.

Role modelling

Managers can encourage employees to take care of their wellbeing and mental health by being effective role models by managing their work/life balance effectively. Encouraging their team to participate in any of your wellbeing and mental health promotions and activities.

Reviewing workloads

Ensure workloads are reasonable and manageable where your managers are sensitive to and recognise we are operating in ‘unusual and unprecedented times.’

Encourage your employees to look after themselves

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Create a company culture where individuals feel comfortable to:

- Take regular rest breaks and continue to take annual leave
- Talk about and seek support for their own wellbeing and mental health if they need it
- Talk to their own HR about wellbeing and mental health
- Prioritise self-care activities
- Be aware of the signs and symptoms of poor wellbeing and mental health and identify if they apply to themselves. Encourage them to use our [Wellbeing Plan of Action Template](#)