



# An Employer's Guide to Returning to the Office Post-COVID-19



**As the restrictions around COVID-19 gradually begin to loosen, a return to the workplace is imminent for many businesses, and it's a welcome change for those struggling with the disruptions of remote working. But with so many factors to consider, particularly around health and safety, managing the reintroduction to office life can be a challenge.**

To help you make the transition in a way that prioritises safety, builds morale and utilises resources most effectively, here is our guide containing everything you need to know when returning to the office post-COVID-19.



## Plan a Staggered Reintroduction

Whilst a return to the office may signal the beginning of a (relative) return to normal, employers will still need to take steps to manage health risks. Having large numbers of employees sharing a space can make it harder to maintain the appropriate physical distance and increases the chances of spreading the virus, so it will be important to control the amount of people in the office at one time, particularly in the initial weeks and months.

The best way to address this issue is by organising a phased reintroduction to the workplace. This will likely mean continuing some degree of remote/flexible working practices for the time being, so find out your employees' preferences and develop a plan that suits both their needs and the available space.

### Options for staggering your team's return to the workplace include:



Enabling some employees to continue working remotely for the immediate future



Implementing rotating "shifts" to allow everyone to work part of the time in the office and part remotely – either every few days or alternating weeks



Staggering start, finish and break times where appropriate



Gradually increasing the number of people in the office as the risk lowers

These options (or a combination of them) will help you accommodate more people in the workplace overall and ensure that everyone who wants to go back to the office has the opportunity to do so, at least part of the time. Keep in mind that if you choose to rotate the employee working in the office, it's a good idea to ensure these groups are spread across functional lines to give people the chance to connect and collaborate.



## Enhance Cleaning and Hygiene Procedures

Obviously, maintaining a high level of hygiene is going to be a key concern when making the transition back to the office after COVID-19, but implementing a thorough cleaning regime can be difficult in the work environment. It will be important to not only develop solid hygiene protocols, but communicate them to the team so they are aware of the expectations and can feel confident that their wellbeing is a priority.

These cleaning procedures will be made up of a variety of elements, depending on your business and the nature of the space you work in.

### Considerations for maintaining hygiene in the office:



Arrange frequent cleaning and sanitisation of all shared areas



Ensure there are stations with hand sanitiser and disinfectant wipes in easily visible places throughout the office



Remove shared drinks and snacks from the kitchen, and opt for disposable cups and utensils



Limit foodservice offerings to pre-packaged, "grab and go" items only



Implement a "clean desk" policy to ensure cleaners don't have to work around employees' belongings



Centralise rubbish and recycling bins and ensure they are regularly emptied each day



Provide no-touch options for taps, soap, paper towel dispensers, doors and bins

Remember that as you plan your processes around cleaning, the emphasis should be on visibility and consistency to ensure employees feel safe returning to the workplace.

## Reconfigure Physical Spaces

One of the biggest challenges of ensuring employees can return to work safely is the office space itself, as working in close quarters increases the risk of being exposed to COVID-19. Adapt the work environment to accommodate physical distancing, minimise the sharing of facilities and limit the number of people each individual comes into contact with. Reorganising the space will also make it easier to prioritise cleaning.

Assess the existing floor plan and reconfigure it to reduce density and minimise the risk of transmission in each area:

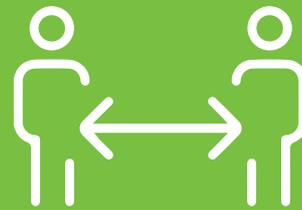
### Workspaces

Determine the maximum capacity of the space and increase the distance between workstations.

The Australian government currently recommends ensuring there is



four square metres of space  
available per person



everyone remains 1.5 metres  
apart whenever possible

To help people follow the guidelines, be sure to remove excess seating wherever possible and consider assigning desks in order to track who sits where.



### Meeting Rooms

Calculate the maximum number of occupants that can be in each meeting room at one time to ensure everyone can maintain physical distance. Limit the number of people attending in-person meetings and training by encouraging team members to continue using tools such as Zoom or MS Teams in addition to/in place of face-to-face sessions.



## Facilities / Ancillary Spaces

Where possible, separate people into smaller groups that have access to designated bathrooms, breakrooms and meal areas. You should also adjust the spacing of furniture in public areas, reception and break out zones, removing surplus seating and items such as pens and magazines, as well as adding signage to help people keep apart.

In addition to layout changes, you should also identify ways to modify tasks and processes that require close interaction to increase physical distancing where it is practical to do so.



## Stay Open and Transparent

Without employee buy-in, even the best-laid plans are likely to fail, which is why consistent, transparent communication is essential for a successful transition back to the office and establishing the “new normal” – not to mention building trust and managing misinformation. Most organisations will have increased the frequency of communications during the remote working period and the return to a physical work environment isn't time to relax this.

Keep in mind that good communication is a two-way street, so it's important to provide your team opportunities to respond, ask questions and provide feedback. Continue to make use of platforms that enable employees to connect, collaborate and facilitate informal discussions such as MS Teams, Slack, Campfire and Wrike. Acknowledge any concerns people have and ensure that all announcements are conveyed with sensitivity.

With the possibility that employee engagement and workplace culture have taken a hit during the peak of the crisis, don't forget to utilise methods such as employee surveys to gauge morale – you can do this through online tools such as SurveyMonkey, and some communication platforms such as Slack even have inbuilt survey functions. When the time is right (and restrictions allow), invest in efforts to rebuild workplace morale such as rewards, teambuilding events and social functions.

### Throughout the transition and beyond, make it a priority to communicate regularly to your team around:



Company changes or updates related to COVID-19



Health and safety measures being implemented in the office, including protocols for hygiene, social distancing and visitors



Collections of “frequently asked questions”



Reassurance for employees around the future of the business and their roles



## Summary

Whilst the return to the workplace may provide a sense of normality, planning that return can be complex. As we proceed towards our “new normal”, we hope this guide will help you with your preparations and enable you to strike the balance between business continuity and employee safety.



02 8096 8600



info@eitr.com.au



02 8088 6341



[www.eitr.com.au](http://www.eitr.com.au)



Level 9,  
50 Margaret Street,  
Sydney, NSW, 2000