

COVID-19: Managing the return to workplace transition – What is your plan?

As Australia continues to "flatten the curve" and government and health advice turns to relaxing COVID-19 measures, employers should start planning how to approach the transition to "business as usual," including a return to the workplace. Key issues for consideration include:

Who?

- Can you prioritise essential/operational employees?
- Can arrangements (eg stand down, leave directions) continue during the transition period for some employees?
- Where appropriate, can some employees continue to work from home? Will the business be required to accommodate preferences?
- Are there employees with vulnerabilities for whom special arrangements need to be made?
- How will you manage employees with concerns about returning to work (and mental health risks)?
- Does the business need to consider any permanent scale down measures as a result of the economic impact of COVID-19?

When?

- Are your plans consistent with the latest Federal and State/Territory health and government advice?
- Can a return to work be implemented in phases?
- Can employees be split into teams on rotating rosters to limit/stagger employees in the workplace?
- Can you transition in some locations/worksites but not others? How will this be managed if your business crosses multiple jurisdictions?
- Have you adequately planned the return to work process for each of the potential phases of the transition period?

What?

- Can/should pre-requisites be imposed (eg health declarations, antibody testing, temperature screening, medical examinations)?
- Should access to the workplace by others be limited/monitored?
- What distancing measures are required (eg common areas, open plan, meetings, transport)?
- Can non-essential meetings and social gatherings be deferred?
- Are cleaning/disinfecting arrangements in place? Are there sufficient hygiene supplies available for employees?
- How will control measures be implemented, monitored and enforced?
- How will employees who develop symptoms be managed? Do you have an exposure control plan?

How?

- Do measures (eg salary reductions, reduced hours) need to be extended/are new measures required? Can this be achieved by consent (if required) in a post-lockdown world?
- Have you adequately informed (and where necessary, consulted) employees about the proposed return to work arrangements and any plans to prolong existing, or put in place new, measures?
- Are your contracts/policies/industrial instruments adequate to enable working flexibly/from a different location/to perform different duties/to maintain modified terms and conditions? Are there any relevant constraints in industrial instruments?
- Do steps need to be taken to plan for another similar event?

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For more information about safety guidance materials released by each jurisdiction for managing COVID-19, please click [here](#).