Emerging from COVID-19: a manager's guide.

Practical advice, useful tips and expert insight to help everyone.
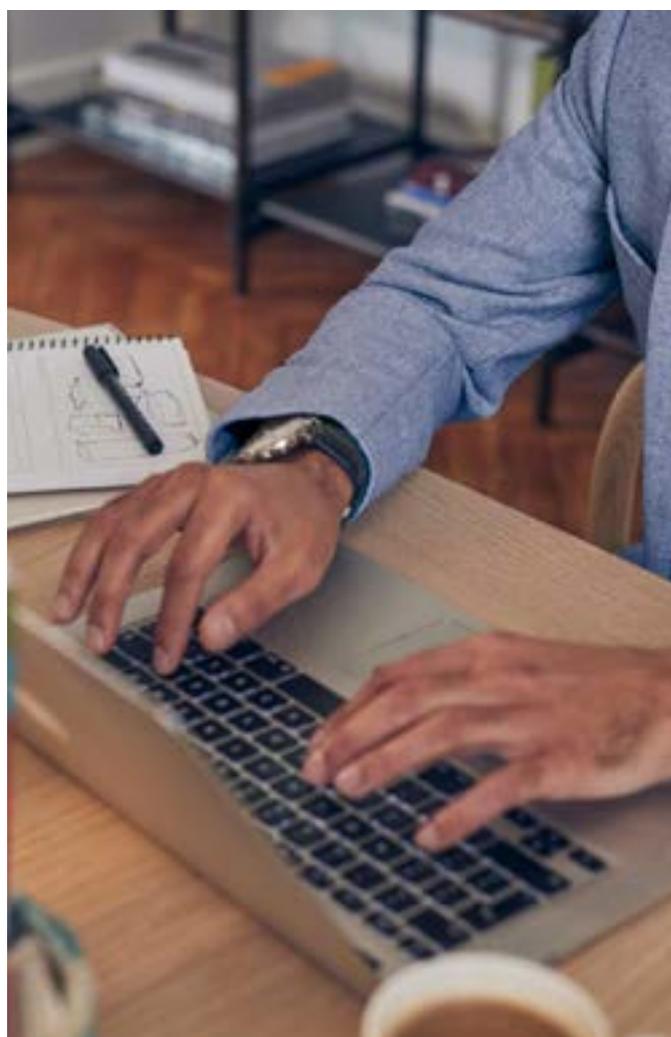
For your team's wellbeing.

Returning to the workplace after lockdown.

The COVID-19 pandemic has already caused unprecedented changes in how businesses around the country need to operate. As lockdown restrictions ease, employers and managers are working hard to develop new working practices, while also supporting staff and their wellbeing. Here we provide guidance to help you negotiate the challenges facing us all in implementing the 'new normal' in workplaces.

Firstly, we look at new working practices that might be necessary. Then we look at the potential impact of the pandemic on your team's wellbeing and how you can help support their return to work.

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Steps to consider

Your team's wellbeing

Looking to the future

Steps to consider for returning to work.

Many businesses have been able to keep going by enabling their staff to work from home wherever possible. That will need to continue for many people. But with certain safeguards in place, some employers can start thinking about getting people back into their usual place of work.

The first step in getting people back into work is a risk assessment. That doesn't mean filling in masses of forms. If you employ fewer than five people, you don't even have to write anything down. You need to think through the potential risks and mitigate them as far as you can. We don't all have HR departments who can do that for us, but taking this step is quite straightforward. You can download templates from the **UK Government** and the **Chartered Institute for Personnel Development (CIPD)**.

Think about things from your staff's viewpoint
Especially if they are closer to day-to-day operations and the risks these might present. Your staff are probably best positioned to understand the risks in the workplace, and they will no doubt have a view on how to work safely. Involving them from the start will help you all to pull together. Keep the communication channels open – people may spot risks in practice that were missed at planning stages. This adjustment will be an ongoing process that needs to be updated and amended as time goes on.

The information here is based on the latest guidance and regulations from the government at the time of writing. It's a good idea to check regularly for updates on the GOV.UK website.

Arriving and leaving.

- You may need to start with a phased return to work.

- Staggering start and finish times will help to avoid overcrowded entrances and exits – and will help staff to avoid public transport in the rush hour.

- Providing parking for employees who need to avoid public transport will help them feel more positive about coming back in to work.

- If you have keypad security systems, you may need to disable them – or provide disposable gloves and a bin where they are in use.

- Provide hand sanitiser at all entrances. Everyone coming in should use it.

Stagger start times

This will help avoid overcrowding at the entrance and help staff avoid public transport during rush hour.

Moving around in the office.

- Implement one-way systems if this is possible, with clearly marked routes and signs.
- All staff who can should use stairs, not lifts. Keep lifts for anyone with a mobility issue.
- Stagger breaks and have meetings outdoors if you can, in well ventilated rooms if not – or keep them virtual, now that we're all much more used to that.
- Communal areas, like tea stations, are not a good idea at the moment.

One-way systems

Clearly mark out routes and signs if this is possible.

Working practices.

- If it's not possible to keep workstations two metres apart, create a distance of one metre apart at least. Consider putting up screens, or at a minimum position people back to back instead of face to face.
- Implement 'team pairing' – named team members from teams that work together frequently are linked to minimise cross-team contact. Avoid hot-desking.
- Provide hand sanitiser where there is likely to be cross-contamination.
- Better still, think about disabling communal equipment, such as printers – now really is the time to go 'paper-free' if it works for your business.

One metre plus distance

Keep workstations at least one metre apart if it's not possible to keep them two metres apart.

Cleaning and sanitation.

- Provide hand sanitiser stations where most needed – entrances, outside staff toilets, in desk areas.

- Have a clear desk policy to make cleaning easier.

- Clean daily: desks, keyboards, phones, door handles, sinks and toilets. Regular cleaning products are fine. Provide disposable gloves and aprons for cleaners.

- Empty bins daily.

- Provide paper towels or air dryers for staff to dry their hands.

- Make sure all staff are fully aware of general precautions, such as coughing and sneezing into a tissue and disposing of it safely, frequent hand washing and distancing. Put up signs if necessary.

- Encourage open windows in enclosed areas, even if you have air conditioning. It's the best way to disperse any virus particles in the air.

Hand sanitiser stations

Provide stations to sanitise where they are most needed, such as entrances and desk areas.

Face coverings and PPE.

- Face coverings are compulsory on public transport and in shops at the time of writing. Some staff may be wearing them on the way to work. Support your workers in wearing face coverings in the workplace too if they choose to. Encouraging staff to be open about their preferences and needs here is important.

- Keep in mind that face coverings don't negate the need for social distancing and good hygiene measures. If staff do wear a face covering they should wash their hands before putting it on and after taking it off. They should avoid touching their mask while wearing it and change it daily, if it gets damp or if they've touched it.

- Homemade cloth face coverings are fine. Hospital grade masks should be kept for industries that need them.

- Current advice is that personal protective equipment (PPE) beyond face coverings is not necessary or recommended outside of health and social care settings. But if your staff normally wear any protective equipment, they should continue to do so.

Wear face coverings

Support your workers in wearing face coverings in the workplace too if they choose to.

Arriving and leaving

Moving around

Best practice

Sanitation

PPE

← → ⌂

Your employees' health and wellbeing.

The past few months have affected businesses and individuals differently. You may be dealing with employees who have been furloughed for weeks, or those who have been working from home or even a mixture of both. As we start the transition back to work, this will likely be a worrying time for most employees, and you will need to consider how you can best support them.
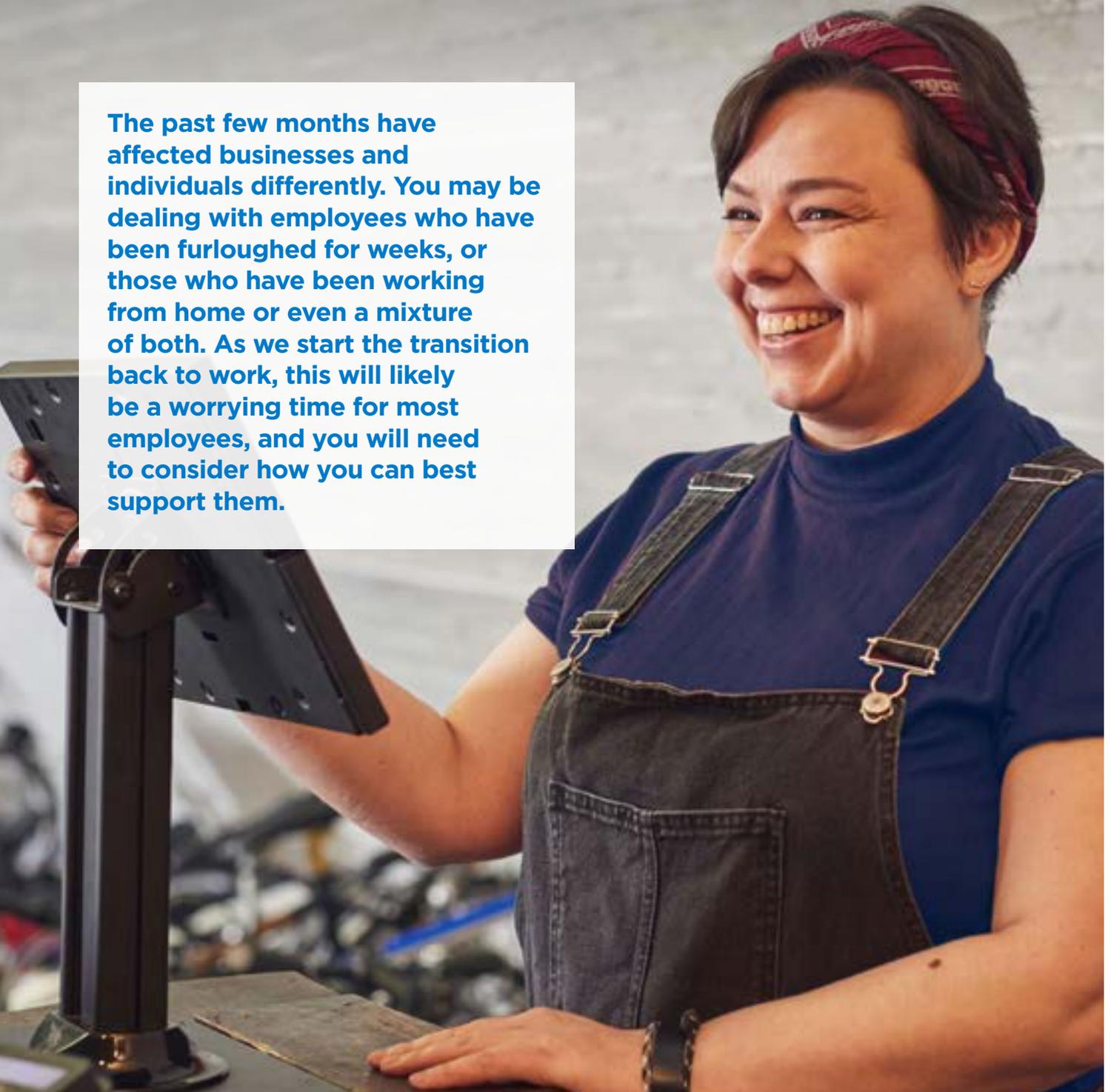
Supporting your team.

Supporting staff through their worries

Everyone's emotional response to the pandemic is different, and all responses are valid. The Office for National Statistics has reported a rise in anxiety levels across the UK. One of the main factors people cite is their work being affected, including concerns related to working from home.

Research from Bupa Health Clinics has highlighted particular worries that office workers have about going back into work, with 65% of people feeling anxious about their return.

The research showed that people are concerned about:

46%
overcrowding in social areas at work

42%
difficulty social distancing

38%
commuting

37%
the workplace not being clean enough

27%
losing their current work-life balance

Source: OnePoll on behalf of Bupa Health Clinics, 2 July 2020.

Talking to your team about these worries will help. Let them know about any support you can offer, for example if you have an employee assistance programme (EAP) or if they are part of a union that offers emotional support.

Be flexible and adaptive to help your team feel more at ease. Are they worried about hygiene? Make sure to let them know about all the rigorous cleaning measures you've put in place. Is commuting more of a worry? You could look into adjusting their hours to avoid the busiest travel times, if that's possible.

Supporting bereaved colleagues

Very sadly, an increased number of people across the country have lost loved ones due to COVID-19. In some cases, this experience has been made all the more difficult by issues around attending funerals or not being able to be physically close to other family members.

As a manager you should be caring and compassionate when a staff member is coping with a bereavement. Offer your condolences and ask how they would like to stay in contact while they take time to grieve, and how much they want others in the company to know. You should also remember that every bereavement is different.

Be adaptive to how the individual staff member is experiencing it. Emphasise that they should take out any time they need, and that they should prioritise their health rather than their work. Don't pressure them to return to work before they are ready, and even once they return to work, keep in mind that they may need days off and ongoing support over time.

More information about supporting employees through bereavement can be found on the **ACAS website** and your employee may find it helpful for you to tell them about support organisations such as **Cruse Bereavement Care**. The Bupa website has **two podcasts** about bereavement due to COVID-19.

EAP support

Let your staff know about support you can offer through an employee assistance programme (EAP) or if they are part of a union that offers emotional support.

Be flexible in the transition back to the workplace

As ever, as a manager you will need to be flexible. Some people may be keen to come back to work and see the colleagues they've missed. Others will be a bit daunted by emerging out of lockdown, using public transport and mixing with people again. Allowing your staff to gradually transition back into full time working hours if possible, is likely to help, especially for furloughed employees.

Accounting for team members who are still working from home

Some employees won't be able to come back yet because they are shielding or live with vulnerable people. Think about whether they might be feeling isolated by this, and if so how you can keep them included through virtual meetings and regular check-ins. Some people may also be preferring working at home to their previous arrangements. This is a good time to review your current processes. You can determine if you need everyone to work from the workplace or if you can start to switch to a more work from home-based approach where applicable.

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Managing conflict

It's important to avoid fostering two parallel cultures when people have different preferences and needs, as an 'us and them' can quickly develop. It'll be easier for those in the workplace to have informal chats about work and those still home working could get left out. Keeping meetings virtual for now may help to foster a feeling of unity.

As a manager, you'll be used to juggling competing needs, but keep an eye out for conflict. In this situation, it's inevitable that people have to be treated differently because their needs are different and that is a recipe for potential conflict. There could also be negative feelings if some staff have been furloughed on 80% pay and others have been working throughout. Getting these issues out in the open with staff discussion groups may help to diffuse any tension.

Be mindful of individual boundaries

You should encourage your staff to feel comfortable and open about talking about their individual needs. COVID-19 has changed life for all of us in different ways. You might have staff who have had COVID-19 or supported a loved one through it. They may be classed as vulnerable or have someone at home who is.

Another possible area of conflict is to do with perceptions of risk. People see things differently, and have different levels of health and vulnerability. Some may not take anti-viral precautions as seriously as others. To keep everyone safe and avoid arguments, you'll have to make it clear to everyone that distancing and hand-cleansing are not optional. Regardless of the differing personal views that will always exist on any government guidance, it's important that all of us stick to what has been decided.

Encourage colleagues to re-establish connections

Socialising with colleagues is an important part of the working day and good for your teams' morale. Bupa's Workplace Wellbeing Census found that colleagues have a positive impact on wellbeing for one in two people.

We'll need to find ways to interact and meet safely, all while following social distance guidelines. That could mean going for walks together during breaks for instance rather than sitting together in a lunch room. If you have any outdoor space, spreading out some tables and chairs could be a nice touch. Remember to keep some events virtual for those still working from home.

There have been challenges over the past few months and these are likely to continue for a while. Staying flexible, encouraging open communication and a culture of pulling together will help you and your staff to move forward.

You should encourage your staff to feel comfortable and open about talking about their individual needs.

1 in 2

employees said colleagues have a positive impact on wellbeing at work.

Bupa Workplace Wellbeing Census, 2019.

Looking to the future.

Much is still uncertain, and the workplace as we knew it will probably have changed. But this doesn't mean that we can't take some positives from what has happened. Businesses across the UK have done an incredible job of adapting quickly, creating new ways of working and virtually supporting their teams.

This is a good time to reflect on what 'normal' used to be and to understand how your employees would really feel about going back to the exact way that things were previously. We might find that the pandemic has created a new way of working that could make the workplace healthier and happier.

Five tips
to take away.

1 Plan for change
Plan for changes to the physical environment and how your team works, to keep everyone as safe and healthy as possible.

Please
Wait here

2 Face any worries
Address worries that your team may have about coming back into the workplace and establish whether any team members need particular support, for example if they are coping with a bereavement.

3 Be flexible
Different team members will probably need different support and working arrangements in the coming months.

4 Build team morale
Anticipate any potential conflicts, for example between those coming in and those still at home. Take steps to address them.

5 Stay positive
Try to take some positives away from everything that has happened. Look at how the situation might have changed things for your team and your business in a positive way, and seek to build on that.

Resources.

Sources

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**bupa.co.uk/
coronavirus**