



THE EXPANDING ROLE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER (CMO)

In a COVID-19 Return-to-Work Plan





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February 2021 statistics from the Bureau of Labor Management (BLS) demonstrate that unemployment numbers are beginning to make positive progress as the nation still reels from almost a year of COVID-19 shutdowns. Per their recent report, notable job gains in professional and business services, and in both public and private education were offset by losses in leisure and hospitality, in retail trade, in health care, and in transportation and warehousing¹.

While overall unemployment numbers are moving in a net positive direction, many businesses are still in a state of limbo because of confusing local, statewide and even national mandates surrounding the return of employees.

Over the course of the past year, many businesses who could, quickly shifted their staff from in-person to remote work environments. Others either completely laid off their workforce, reduced employees to part-time schedules, implemented temporary layoffs, or had employees who were forced to work less with children learning remotely.

The good news is that 3 in 4 workers are willing and ready to return to the office when the health risks of the pandemic subside². The challenge for business owners is when and how to make things happen.

So, the question remains...how do businesses move forward with a multi-pronged approach that helps them understand and abide by official government policies, begin financial recovery, consider new costs, such as testing, and cover the safety needs and concerns of their employees and customers?



¹ News Release, Bureau of Labor Statistics , February 5th, 2021, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>

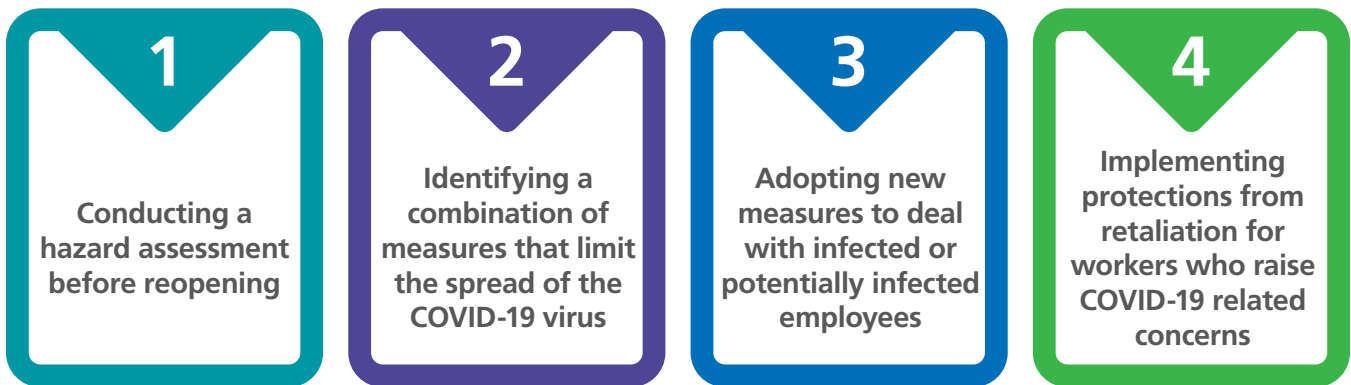
² How Employers Will Win Back Office Workers in 2021, CNBC.com, December 10th, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/12/10/how-employers-will-win-back-office-workers-in-2021.html>

SAFETY PROTOCOLS AND NEW WORKPLACE MODELS

Even with the release of multiple vaccines, therapies and an ever-expanding knowledge base on the virus, we are already seeing new recommendations surrounding safety. Experts believe new standards will continue to emerge that will modify how different industries return to doing business in what will be the new normal.

To further complicate the issue, new, contagious variants of the Coronavirus are being discovered across the globe, thus leading to further trepidation. As of this publication, there are new U.K., South African and Brazilian variants³.

OSHA, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, is providing some guidance for businesses and their reopening plans, with recommendations including the following⁴:



While these guidelines are helpful, some business owners are still at a loss for how to proceed.

THE NEW NORMALS

Businesses and employees must be ready to embrace a new work environment as things begin to return to varying levels of normalcy. Some companies will mirror tactics used during much of 2020, including a larger virtual workforce, less in-person interactions and a decreased reliance on commercial business locations.

Others who find the virtual work environment challenging or altogether impossible must ensure that both customers and employees remain safe and feel secure. No matter the scenario, a plan-of-action for returning to work is an essential component of corporate success across industries.

³ Map: Track the Spread of COVID-19 Variants Across the United States, February 17th, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/map-track-spread-covid-19-variants-across-united-states-n1256131>

⁴ Protecting Workers: Guidance on Mitigating and Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in the Workplace, January 29th, 2021, <https://www.osha.gov/coronavirus/safework>

A NEW SPOTLIGHT ON THE CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER (CMO)

As a result of the importance of workplace health concerns and the uncertainty from rapidly evolving knowledge on COVID-19—the role of Chief Medical Officer (CMO) is increasingly being added—sometimes only temporarily or on an interim basis during COVID-19—to the C-suite in industries of all types.

CMOs are critical for companies who need ongoing guidance on how to safely reopen their businesses, create post-COVID-19 confidence in their workers and customer base, and bring a comforting presence to a returning workforce that is looking for expert guidance and a cogent plan.

While Chief Medical Officers have traditionally been found in hospitals, clinics and healthcare related settings, things are rapidly changing. As such, their duties are expanding, moving far beyond their role as liaison between physicians and the C-suite or as managers of day-to-day operations in healthcare facilities.

Today's CMOs, especially during COVID-19, are playing a larger, strategic role by helping companies maintain and improve employee morale. Dr. Ashwini Zenooz of StatNews⁵ says “the role of the Chief Medical Officer—once an afterthought or a latecomer to the C-suite—has been thrust into the limelight. Existing CMOs have seen their roles rewritten or expanded on the fly, while companies far outside of healthcare are recognizing the value of CMOs for the first time.”

Even before the pandemic, the CMO was gaining traction as a team member and leader in varying industries, sometimes even providing market strategy and product development advice along with their traditional role of creating general company wellness policies and employee health standards.

Ashwini continues, “The pandemic has driven home the message that, in one sense or another, every company is now in the business of health.” Hence, the CMO is now needed in industries of all kinds as companies struggle to create safety protocols that go beyond social distancing, hand sanitizing and temperature checks and look towards total wellness.



5 The Ever Expanding Role of the Chief Medical Officer, Statnews, October 2020, <https://www.statnews.com/2020/10/30/chief-medical-officer-expanding-role-pandemic/>

A NEW CHALLENGE FOR THE C-SUITE

The challenge for many CEOs and C-suite leaders lies in what has been an unprecedented pandemic for the business leaders of today. To complicate matters, GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, notes that future pandemics are almost certain because of several factors⁶, including increases in global travel, more urbanization, climate change, increased human-animal contact and health care worker shortages.

To navigate these concerns, each industry must assess risk and create a plan that ensures success. This is where CMOs are adding value to the conversation.

Per Dr. Cole Edmonson, Chief Experience and Clinical Officer at AMN Healthcare, the role can be summed up as follows:

“Chief Medical Officers are a critical part of leading and innovating in protocols, policies and practice that are improving the safety of workplaces and creating a focus on total wellness. The role as a trusted colleague and leader with other senior level executives has evolved over the last 5 years to be critical in the ongoing performance on companies and achieving the business results as a part of the strategic plan. Physician executives work to continually improve the quality of the experience, to improve outcomes, to mitigate risk and keep wellbeing at the forefront of a company’s responsibility.”

– Dr. Cole Edmonson, Chief Experience and Clinical Officer at AMN Healthcare

In addition, the role of the CMO is an integral part of any strategy during COVID-19 as companies must be prepared to answer a variety of important questions before they begin an aggressive return to work plan.

While the following suggestions are a good start, CMOs can help deepen the conversation and increase the success rate of any new plan.

⁶ 5 Reasons Why Pandemics Like COVID-19 are Becoming More Likely, June 2020, <https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/5-reasons-why-pandemics-like-covid-19-are-becoming-more-likely>

10 KEY QUESTIONS COMPANIES MUST ADDRESS

1	When is the right time to reopen?	6	What role can COVID-19 testing play in a return-to-work scenario?
2	At what capacity should customer facing brick-and-mortar establishments reopen?	7	What happens when an employee tests positive?
3	How should a return-to-work policy be communicated?	8	When will business travel resume?
4	Who should return to work?	9	What types of PPE (personal protective equipment) should be on hand and available?
5	What protection protocols should be implemented?	10	Is it okay to ask employees about their interactions with large groups or if they wear masks outside work?

WHAT THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL (CDC) IS RECOMMENDING

In addition to the above list, the CDC recommends⁷ even deeper considerations to ensure a safe transition. Examples include how to ensure social distancing, be PPE prepared, create appropriate barrier/partitional controls in the workplace, establish new policies on sick days, ensure the availability of testing supplies and testing personnel, and how to support the mental well-being of a population that has, in many cases, been secluded for almost a year.

In order to keep employee engagement high, employers must be prepared to address the ramifications of long-term isolation and help team members regain the comradery and teamwork that was a critical part of their interactions pre-pandemic.

⁷ CDC Coronavirus Business Response, CDC.gov, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>

AMN HEALTHCARE IS HERE TO HELP

AMN Healthcare understands that no one return to work policy is ideal for every industry. We've had a finger on the pulse of the COVID-19 pandemic from its early stages, providing the most qualified talent to healthcare facilities across every critical niche on the healthcare staffing spectrum.

As more and more companies seek guidance on their return-to-work policies, we have played an integral role in providing CMOs to help businesses establish reopening policies and protocols.

Whether you need a temporary leader to fill this role or are interested in hiring a full-time candidate to better drive and establish your company's overall healthcare policies, we can help you be successful.



TO LEARN MORE

Request a call from an account representative or watch a short video on how AMN Healthcare is helping companies in every industry return to work.

- ▶ **Fill out the Form to Request a Call**
- ▶ **Watch the Video**