

Returning to work after COVID-19: Feelings, tools and resources

Presenter – Lynn Borteck, Clinical Counselor

Welcome everyone to today's webinar on returning to work during COVID-19. Feelings, tools and resources. My name is Lynn Borteck and I'm a clinical social worker. And I'm happy to bring you this updated topic. Just want to clarify that this is an overview. And if you have specific questions, you are going to want to ask your employer and also consult with your physician if you have any medical questions because this is also not medical advice. But welcome, we are going to get started.

Have you been asked to return to your workplace?

So it's possible that you have been asked to return to your workplace after a year or maybe even more of being out of your workplace. Perhaps you've been working remotely, perhaps you've even been out of work for awhile, but many businesses are now starting to reopen on live and onsite. And each different business is needing to take different precautions. For instance, if it's a healthcare setting or a restaurant type of setting, there may still be a need for masking and wearing gloves and so forth.

Other settings may have other guidelines, perhaps more relaxed guidelines as things are currently getting a little bit more lenient. Both employers and employees are really dealing with lots and lots of questions and unknowns because let's face it, we've not been down this road before. And of course, we all hopefully are coming out of COVID-19, but we want to do it sensibly and carefully. This is a very dynamic situation which changes all the time. So we need to keep an eye on the changes, and in terms of going back to work, we want to be safe. And we also want to be aware of what the rules and regulations are.

What are your concerns?

So what are your concerns with returning to your workplace? These are some common concerns. People are worried about what their workplace is going to do to help them stay healthy and help them not get COVID-19. People are also worried about finding care for dependents like their little kids or their perhaps elderly parents or children or adults with special needs.

Maybe they've been caring for them while they've been working remotely or they've been home. But now if they're going to return to the workplace, they need to find the support that they were using probably before the pandemic. And so they're gonna have to look into that. Also, people are concerned about what the vaccination and masking policies are going to be in the workplace. And they're dealing with their own fears and unknowns about COVID-19 because we do hope that things are getting better, but we're all still careful and concerned.

Staying healthy

So let's talk about what your workplace is going to do to help you stay well. Let me assure you that every employer will have a plan. And this plan could include asking you to wear a mask, asking you to wear gloves, perhaps starting the day by taking your temperature. Requiring that you have COVID testing once a week or once a month. Certainly encouraging that you wash your hands all through the day. Maybe they'll be providing hand sanitizing stations.

When I've been out in public recently in the supermarket, or in the mall, or the pharmacy, there are almost always hand sanitizers and machines standing in very obvious places where you can clean your hands when you don't have soap and water. Also, workplaces are going to be taking extra care in getting common spaces really clean. Bathrooms and kitchens will all be cleaned with extra care so that these common areas stay as clean and germ-free as possible.

There may be some new ventilation systems installed. You may notice that when you go back to your workplace so that areas where there wasn't much ventilation before, probably will have new ventilation systems now so that air keeps moving. And there are certain places that may require or very much encourage you to be vaccinated before you return to work. So these are just some, I'm just scratching the surface here, of some of the things that your employer may be requiring or asking of you or putting in place to help keep their workforce safe.

Dependent care

And then there's dependent care. And this is where you're involved. And if you've been taking care of dependents while you've been working remotely, you may need to find care for them again because you're not going to be home anymore if you're going back to work. So you need to find out are the supports that you used to use up and running like your daycare center, or your adult daycare center for elderly people, or do you need help finding some new resources. And I want to assure you don't be overwhelmed by this task because

we can help you. You can call your EAP or work-life services any time for free referrals and lots of help in finding places that will help you with dependent care.

Things to remember

Some things for you to remember as you returned to work. Number one, you need still to be careful. Whatever you hear on the news about things getting better, that's all very, very encouraging, but we need to remember that not everybody is vaccinated, which that carries its own issues. Also, nobody wants to bring COVID-19 home from work. And so you want to be careful at work and you want to maybe keep your social distancing or follow the guidelines that are set out for you for safe workspace between you and your coworkers. And remember there are still unknowns.

So we're encouraging you to still be cautious. You might consider things like when you get home, the first thing you do is wash your hands really, really well. And also be very aware about any symptoms you might be developing. And if you do start to feel ill, or start to cough, or have any other kinds of symptoms, get yourself tested for COVID. It's easier than ever to get a COVID test. And better safe than sorry. If you have any other questions that have to do with staying safe medically, contact your family doctor to discuss any other precautions that might have to do with you or your family's own risk factors.

Readjusting...again!

And here we are readjusting again. If this period of time has taught us anything, it's that we human beings are capable of adjusting and readjusting and readjusting. And challenges this time around includes some new time management. Because if you're going to be returning to work that may include a commute, it will include social interaction and questions about social distancing. It will be the questions about having normal emotions during this period of time because we're all coming out of a really difficult period. And it's only natural to still be worried and perhaps afraid.

And certainly lots of us are sad. Many people have lost loved ones and family members and friends, and are still grieving those losses. Plus we've lost precious time. We've basically had a year on hold and that's not easy for anyone. So we may be sad and we may be angry about these very same losses. All of these emotions are to be expected. Own them. Know when you have them. Feel them. If you need to talk to someone about them, you can always call your EAP or work life service to get some counseling if you think that would help you. Or talk to a trusted friend or whoever. Don't be ashamed of any feelings you might have. We're all having them.

Another challenge is going to be being productive back in the workplace, even despite these worries and these concerns that are still around, and getting comfortable again with having coworkers. And finally staying informed because although we are definitely through with COVID, we're not 100% sure that COVID is through with us. So we do want to stay informed and find out what the latest developments are, and want to stay alert for any new guidance.

If you're unsure...ask!

If you're unsure about anything in the workplace or about returning to work, please ask. Ask your manager if you have any questions about any of the things that we've talked about today, or any other safety measures or thoughts you may have about safety in your workplace. Remember your manager is learning too. None of us have been down this road before, so we're all in the learning stage and there's nothing wrong with asking.

You can also visit the Centers for Disease Control website, [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov), and search under workplaces and businesses if you want to read the latest information about guidance, COVID 19 guidance. And also, you can use the [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) website for information about all kinds of questions with regard to wellness, COVID-19, and any other concerns.

Thank you for attending

And finally, thank you. This is the end of today's brief overview. I hope that you have heard some things that are going to encourage you to feel good about going back to work. And I wish you lots of luck. And please stay safe.

Resources For Living

The EAP is administered by Resources For Living, LLC. This material is for informational purposes only. Information is not a substitute for professional health care and is not meant to replace the advice of health care professionals. Contact a health care professional with any questions or concerns about specific health care needs.

©2021 Resources For Living | 44.27.485.1 (5/21)