QUESTCO

RETURN-TO-WORK CONSIDERATIONS

A COVID-19 Update from Questco – May 13th, 2020

Many items need to be taken into consideration as the country begins to re-open and employees are asked to return to the workplace. Bringing employees back to the workplace during and after the COVID-19 pandemic will not be as simple as announcing a reopening and carrying on business as usual. Not only will there be required changes to business operations initially, some changes may be much longer term.

Questco offers a **Return-to-Work Checklist** on our COVID-19 resource center that addresses multiple things to consider, including posting changes to company policies and procedures, health and safety compliance, and other workplace best practices in a COVID-19 environment. Consider using this checklist to ensure that your business and employees are prepared for a safe and successful re-opening.

Each company's return to work plan should be tailored to their specific operating environment and industry as well as local government regulations and therefore, will look different. Listed below are a few key considerations all employers should understand and start preparing for now.

WORKPLACE SAFETY
As you prepare for the re-opening of your business, answer these questions regarding the workplace safety necessary to provide for a safe environment.
- Preliminary Considerations Before Re-Opening
    - According to CDC guidance recently released, employers should answer three questions when deciding whether to reopen:
        - Are you in a community no longer requiring significant mitigation?
        - Will reopening be in compliance with state and local orders?
        - Will you be ready to protect employees at higher risk for severe illness?
    - Should you implement an employee health screening procedure?
        - Temperature check
        - COVID-19 tests to employees prior to returning to work
    - Is there a state order requiring masks be worn?
    - What additional cleaning actions are required to prepare the workplace for returning workers and to maintain a healthy workplace?
- Take Recommended Safety Actions
    - Promote hygiene practices such as hand washing, wearing a face covering.
    - Increase cleaning, disinfection, and ventilation.
    - Ensure social distancing, including altering workplace layout to increase distance between employees, extend telework practices, stagger shifts, and rotate weeks in the office.
    - Limit work-related travel and modify commuting practices.
    - Train all staff on safety.
- Implement Safeguards for Ongoing Employee Monitoring
    - Check for signs and symptoms of employees.
    - Encourage employees who are sick to stay home.

- o Have a plan in place for when an employee gets sick.
  - o Be ready to close if there are increased virus cases.
  - o Consider requiring a disclaimer or acknowledgement from all employees stating they understand the risks of returning to work.
- Prepare your Workplace for Opening
  - o The CDC has guidance for cleaning and disinfecting public spaces, workplaces, business, schools and homes.
    - ▪ [Cleaning and Disinfecting your Facility](#)
- Maintain Routine Cleaning
  - o Develop daily cleaning and disinfecting procedures.
  - o Ensure sufficient cleaning supplies on hand.
  - o Continue to monitor COVID-19 workplace requirements in your area.

EMPLOYEE RECALL PROCEDURES

Plan for how and when employees will return to work or to the worksite to create an organized and controlled approach. All employees returning on the same day and time could be unsafe.

- Phase-in employees returning to work.
- Ensure employee recall is non-discriminatory. Criteria for developing your recall plan could include:
  - o Unique or difficult to replace skill sets
  - o Overall performance
  - o Seniority
  - o Demonstrated ability and willingness to do work outside of usual assignments
- Make sure state unemployment agencies are notified of employees recalled back to work.
  - o Employees who are working a reduced schedule are likely to still be eligible to participate in state UI programs.
- Determine how to handle employees who are unable or unwilling to return to work.
  - o Employees who decline to return to work; employers should report this to the state, and this will likely result in UI ineligibility.
  - o Employees who are fearful of returning to work.
  - o Employees who have family obligations or remain under quarantine due to exposure to COID-19.
- Review employee handbook and current policies to update as it relates to COVID-19.
- Consider sending out **recall letters** to the employees to track and document the employee's response and acceptance to return to work.

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

Review your policies and expiration dates for COVID-19 related impact due to employee absence or break in service. Certain notices or actions may be required to remain compliant. Communicating these changes to employees should be done as soon as possible.

- Health Insurance
  - o Examine waiting period issues due to leave or reinstatement. Review any eligibility requirements applicable to layoffs or furloughs and determine if those requirements will be revoked and how that will impact your returning employees.

- If employee premiums were paid during leave, determine how or if the employer will recover those costs from the employees.
- Flexible Spending Accounts
  - Review dependent care needs with employees to offer election changes and ensure their new or revised elections are properly submitted.
  - Over the counter medical products are now covered under flexible spending accounts on a permanent basis retroactive back to January 1, 2020; this policy change should be communicated to employees.
- Paid Leave
  - Review required leave programs made available under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA); ensure employees understand the eligibility requirements.
  - Review company PTO policies and determine if changes will be needed including increasing or decreasing paid leave benefits or implementing additional restrictions with respect to the usage of paid leave.

Please watch for further communications from Questco regarding Dependent Care programs and contact your benefits specialist with any specific coverage questions.

COMPENSATION

Compensation adjustments may be required prior to reopening to address changes in job responsibilities, scheduling assignments and/or return-to-work incentives.
- Will any pay cuts be made or revoked? Understand how to reduce salaries for exempt employees if required.
- Employee status changes may be needed prior to reopening.
- Employers who received Paycheck Protection Program loan proceeds will need to monitor payroll costs over their 8-week covered period to meet requirements for loan forgiveness.
- Review our [Questco COVID-19 Resource Page](#) "Employee Pay Considerations" for further information.

REMOTE WORK

Teleworking has proven to be an effective and efficient solution during the pandemic for some employers and employees. Employers should consider the continued use of teleworking as a longer-term solution or possibly as a permanent work solution and potential cost-saving measure. When evaluating the feasibility of teleworking, consider the following:
- Continue to allow remote work where possible to keep employees safe.
- Stagger weeks in the office and at home among team members.
- Respond to employee requests to continue to work from home.
- Update technology to support virtual workers.
- Establish a formal teleworking policy:
  - Set guidelines and expectations for employees that are teleworking.
  - Be clear on requirements surrounding work hours, prioritizing tasks, and meeting attendance.

COMMUNICATIONS

A clear communications plan will allow employees and customers to understand how the organization plans to reopen or reestablish business procedures.

- Be transparent in all communications with employees on policies, safety, and other expectations.
- Display FFCRA Poster as required by the Department of Labor. Email or post on intranet/company website for employees that are working remotely.
- Educate employees about CDC recommendations for reducing the spread of COVID-19 and the expectation for employees regarding when to stay home and the ability to use Emergency Paid Sick Leave under the FFCRA.
- Place posters throughout the workplace to encourage social distancing and hand hygiene.

The CDC has a resource page for downloadable posters to use in your workplace - CDC Print Resource Page

This is a constantly evolving area, with new guidance being issued nearly every day. Questco will continue to monitor return-to-work developments and other COVID-19 related matters and provide updates to help our clients manage through these disruptive times.

If you have any questions or need further information, please reach out to your Questco customer service representative.

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