



## RETURN-TO-OFFICE WORKGROUP

### RECOMMENDATIONS



MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF  
LABOR & ECONOMIC  
OPPORTUNITY

## PURPOSE

### **Advise the administration on a phased return to in-person office work, taking into account the trajectory of the pandemic, vaccines and mitigation measures focusing on challenges and opportunities.**

As Michigan ramps up vaccine distribution, more employers and workers are preparing to return to in-person office work in some form.

To support this process, the State established a new Return-to-Office Workgroup consisting of business, labor and public health experts to provide Governor Gretchen Whitmer with concise recommendations that will be used to inform Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) and Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) policies and guidance as well as standards and best practices for employers to use in planning their own phased reopening.

The State's priority remains the health and safety of Michigan workers and workplaces and bringing this new group together provided a mechanism to capture key insights to align policies with best practices and health guidance.

**The workgroup met weekly from March 18 to April 22, 2021, and focused on four key areas:**

**01** Physical Workplaces

**02** Human Resources Policies

**03** Public Health Issues

**04** Employee Supports

The workgroup consulted a variety of data including MDHHS public health data, MIOSHA information, local economic impact data and best practice information provided by members of the workgroup.

Members focused on current health conditions, so recommendations were not intended to be permanent.

In addition to the workgroup's efforts on return-to-office work, the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity has recently held several feedback sessions with legislative leaders, small businesses and representatives from many business sectors including financial services, manufacturing, legal and insurance services.

The recommendations are based on real-world feedback from a diverse set of business, labor and public health experts. The members of this group have been navigating the unique COVID-19 challenges in their field to make informed recommendations.

## STATE POLICIES



### MIOSHA GUIDANCE

- Provide consistent benchmarks to the extent practical to allow phased return planning.
- Provide a more succinct definition with applicable office work examples, if possible, to add clarity regarding the term, “feasibility.”
- Consider addressing additional questions including:
  - Mentoring and training of employees.
  - Task-based work functions (e.g., some work in-person, some remote).
  - Clarify employer’s ability to update the policy as needed, and recognize changing conditions.
  - Consider individual feasibility based on an employee’s ability to successfully complete their functions remotely (e.g., classification may be remote, but individually employee either struggles or does not have the tools/ability to function remotely).
  - Consider collaboration and team functions.
  - Consider employee well-being/mental health.
  - Ensure employees and employers understand in-person work is permitted.



**Communication Recommendations:** Develop a clearer communication stream when updates occur. Create an office COVID-19 mitigation checklist. Recognize that hybrid work models create planning hardship for childcare providers, directly share work and phasing to allow adequate planning.



### MDHHS GUIDANCE

- Provide more consistent updates to the [November 6 guidance](#) as necessary and regularly to reflect current trends of vaccination and infection.



**Communication Recommendations:** Develop more clear communication when updates occur and ensure consistent messaging between agencies.



### CHILDCARE

- Support for continued funding for childcare providers and expansion.
- Support training and certification of childcare providers, find creative ways to increase childcare wages to enhance employment opportunities.
- Support Tri-Share programs to support workers and employers in overcoming this challenge.

## EMPLOYER POLICIES



### REDUCING OFFICE DENSITY

- Consider utilizing hybrid work strategies to promote social distancing.
- When feasible, focus on task-based collaboration and specific needs for in-person work while allowing other tasks and teamwork to be completed remotely.
- To better educate employees on what to expect when returning, consider in-person or virtual workplace tours.
- Ensure consistent scheduling of remote work to provide predictability to employees.



**Communication Recommendations:** Provide clear communication on reopen plan and goals with clarity on how this impacts workplace safety and health.



### OPERATIONAL OBSTACLES

- **Entry and Exit Procedures:** Stagger start and end times as practical to avoid congregation through common entrances and elevators.
- **Daily Health Screenings:** Stagger entry times to avoid congregation at screening checkpoints, consider using screening apps to complete prior to entry.
- **Quarantine/Isolation:** Plan for needs related to quarantine or isolation based on current requirements and guidance including employees needing to quarantine or isolate due to caregiving and childcare obligations.
- **Building Considerations:** Prepare workspaces including considerations for HVAC systems in accordance with guidance from [ASHRAE](#), [OSHA](#), [CDC](#) and [EPA](#).
- **Water Systems Guidance:** Ensure water systems are flushed and safe prior to more occupancy in accordance with [EPA](#) and EGLE guidance.



**Communication Recommendations:** Effectively communicate these requirements to building owners.



### COMMUNICATION

- Ensure effective and continuous communication with employees on plans, procedures, expectations and updates as it relates to reopening.
- Establish employee one-pagers and/or signage, in addition to plans on specific areas of focus to add understanding and compliance in the following areas:
  - Social Distancing
  - Face Coverings
  - Hygiene



- o Health Screening
  - o How to file a complaint if requirements are not being followed
- Consider communicating information on Federal tax policy changes related to childcare tax credit.
- Communicate changes in employer policies regarding parental need for childcare.



## QUARANTINE / ISOLATION / TESTING

- Ensure policy clearly articulates the ability of employees to quarantine, isolate and test without risk of job loss.
- Consider allowing employees capable of remote work to continue working during isolation at the employee's discretion.
- To the extent practical, provide paid leave in addition to regular paid leave benefits to ensure employees quarantine and/or isolate.
- Employers unable to provide a paid leave benefit should consider unpaid leave in lieu of using accrued leave benefits at the employee's discretion.
- Promote the use of sick leave tax credits available for employers with 500 or fewer employees to provide paid leave.



## CAREGIVING / CHILDCARE

- Establish a return policy that allows employees with caregiving obligations to continue remote work, including caregiving of immuno-compromised persons.
- Consider a flexible policy allowing employees requesting to return prior to requiring larger groups to return.
- Ensure policies recognize that “quarantine,” can happen instantly based on caregiver support such as childcare or school cancellations.
- Ensure policies include the ability for employees to communicate informally their needs outside of the workplace that may impact their ability to return to in-person work. (An informal accommodation identifying employees that would experience a hardship because of a return to the office).
- Consider paid leave policies in addition to accrued leave benefits to allow employees flexibility.
- Employers unable to provide a paid leave benefit should consider unpaid leave in lieu of using accrued leave benefits at the employee's discretion.
- Promote the use of family leave tax credits available for employers with 500 or fewer employees to provide paid leave.
- Employers should communicate to their employees the important changes to the [Child Tax Credit](#) that will help many families receive advance payments starting this summer.
- Establish clear policies that ensure employees may take family leave without risk of job loss.
- Consider an employer focused “task force,” to prioritize employee population needs related to childcare.
- Recognize traditional corporate culture may impair adoption of flexibility due to career concern, missing opportunities and separation.



## TRAVEL POLICY

- Employers should consider implementing travel policies that recognize potential exposures and require quarantine periods, as necessary upon return.



## TRANSPORTATION

- **For Employees:** Recognize that public transportation options may be limited, causing potential needs for flexibility around start/stops, etc.
- **For Caregiving and Childcare:** Recognize that transportation options for children or other family members may be more limited, sporadic, or unavailable causing employees to need flexibility in meeting these challenges.



## LEARNING LABS

- To support parents returning to in-person work facing childcare or educational challenges, organizations could support development of, “Learning Labs,” in communities of high need. Organizations should consider incentives to form them, while prioritizing at-risk populations.

### CASE STUDY: CITY OF LANSING



City provided space and oversight of students, partnered with school and IT to ensure consistent access to virtual learning.



School district, parks and many different entities collaborated to implement the labs.



Parents could drop off virtual students at the Learning Lab. Lab ensured participation in virtual education and offered community center experience once students were finished.



## VACCINES

- Set vaccination goals employer-wide, consider achievement rewards (free food, gift card drawing, etc.)
- Set a vaccination goal that is higher than 70% if most of the employees are customer-facing or higher-risk.

- Provide up-to-date information to employees on the vaccines.
- Provide links to vaccination sites/sign-up information.
- Consider partnering where possible with local public health to offer on-site vaccination.
- Add COVID-19 vaccination to existing wellness programs and benchmarks.
- Employers could work with local partners (e.g. local county health department, pharmacies, hospital systems) to coordinate offering on-site or nearby vaccination for employees and family members in business districts.
- Employers should consider asking employees whether they are getting vaccinated and try to understand roadblocks to becoming vaccinated – include links to the [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission \(EEOC\)](#) that it is lawful to ask.
- Employers should consider paying employees to get vaccinated and take advantage of the [tax credit](#) available to employers with 500 or fewer employees through the IRS to cover these payroll costs.
- Focus on public facing employees and add simplicity for sign-up to alleviate concerns.
- Consider incentives as appropriate (e.g., paid time off, lunches, etc.)
- Update plans to incorporate updated guidance from MIOSHA and CDC on vaccination and changes:
  - Fully vaccinated individuals may not need to quarantine (e.g., lose work) for close contacts.
  - Reduces likelihood of workplace outbreaks causing disruptions to operations.



**Communication Recommendations:** Provide benefits of vaccination and need to ensure workplace safety. Leverage daily “safety moments” and other traditional workplace safety communication channels. Be persistent!

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