

A person wearing a white protective suit, hairnet, and a white respirator mask with yellow straps is working in a laboratory or industrial setting. They are wearing blue gloves and are adjusting a metal component on a piece of equipment. The background is slightly blurred, showing other industrial equipment and a green container.

Thinking Ahead: How to Effectively Prepare for a Safe Relaunch Post-COVID-19

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

The 2019 outbreak of the novel coronavirus that causes the respiratory disease called COVID-19 has disrupted life for millions across America, claiming lives and bringing business to a standstill. For many workers, the pandemic has caused long periods away from work as employers either shut down or shift to remote work where possible. The effects have been staggering both for workers and the economy as a whole.

- **3 in 10** lost jobs, lost income, or had hours reduced without pay
- **7 in 10** said their lives have been disrupted by the outbreak
- **Nearly 36.5 million+** jobless claims in eight-week period following first shutdowns

Getting Back to Work

With state governments gradually easing back from stay-at-home orders and mandatory business closures, many companies are assessing their options for reopening.

Top Concerns for Reopening After COVID-19 Shutdown

- Preventative measures
- Building entry procedures, health screening, and self-reporting
- Weathering the second wave
- Injury prevention

Resuming business carries risk. Workers will face a host of risks when they return, both to their health and their physical safety. The workforce health challenges that safety managers and employees will encounter in the coming months will be unprecedented, and employers across the country now must do everything in their power to prevent the spread of this dangerous new illness while also managing the everyday risks inherent to the workplace. The transition will require employers to be prepared for both health and safety risks with proactive, holistic strategies.

Injuries—musculoskeletal disorders, repetitive strain injuries, and many others—do not pause for the sake of a pandemic. Safety managers must contend with an array of new illness and health risks that affect every part of the workplace, from manufacturing floors and warehouses to offices and executive suites.

- Employees have been away for as long as **2-3 months** since shutdowns began
- Prolonged inactivity or time away **increases injury risk** when employees return to work
- **Stress, anxiety, and fatigue** will increase as work resumes, elevating injury risks



5 KEY COMPONENTS OF COVID-19 RETURN-TO-WORK FRAMEWORK



Workforce Planning

- Feasibility
- Pandemic Preparedness
- Employee Support
- Communications
- Supply Chain



Physical Environment

- Audit
- Space Planning
- Shift Flighting/Pods
- Workplace Precautions
- Deep Cleaning



Active Monitoring

- Testing
- Screening
- Contact Tracing
- Resiliency Assessment
- Community Scanning & Thresholds



Prevention and Sustainability

- Vaccines and Treatments
- Ongoing Monitoring and Follow-Up



Injury Prevention and Virtual Safety

- Virtual Training
- Virtual Ergonomic Evaluations
- Onsite Therapy and Ergonomics
- Wearables & Exoskeletons
- Mental Health & Wellness Apps
- Pain Management

Source: <https://www.indianachamber.com>

WORKFORCE PLANNING

When preparing to reopen, management should take action to designate a return-to-work planning committee that will analyze the organization's preparedness and the needs of the employees who will be returning to their jobs. This team must be ready to face challenges not only in the workplace itself but in communicating policies and rationale to workers. The transition back to work will involve the entire business community, and every part of your organization will be affected, from supply chains to shipping, transportation, security, production, and beyond. To cover all the bases, you'll need a team that includes supervisors from across your operations, as well as representatives from EHS, human resources, legal, and employee unions.

- **Feasibility**

Determine how your operations can be safely resumed at any capacity while still observing necessary social distancing and disease prevention guidelines.

- **Pandemic Preparedness**

Evaluate stock of personal protective equipment (PPE) and ensure that facilities, management, and employees are provided all necessary resources to follow health guidelines and work safely.

- **Employee Support**

Prepare to manage fears, anxieties, and expectations of staff as they get ready to return to work. Create resources to help ease stressful aspects of the transition.

- **Communications**

Relay policies and information on support resources with clarity and transparency. Employees should be well-informed on the latest public health guidelines from the CDC and WHO, including any over-the-counter or medications that are suggested or warned against by health officials.

- **Supply Chain**

Evaluate each link in your supply chain for resiliency against the current crisis and account for any changes that may disrupt operations upon reopening.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Managers should prepare to make a range of adjustments to the workplace both in configuration and in employee policy. Data collection and observation are key steps to help equip your business with a safe reopening strategy.

- **Audit**

Evaluate critical parts of the work environment such as entry points, communal areas, and workspaces for risk factors including proximity and employee density. Consider continuing remote and virtual work plans for employees who are able to accomplish their tasks offsite.

- **Space Planning**

Adjust workspace configurations to limit close physical interaction between employees and ensure necessary social distancing per public health guidelines. This may mean increasing distance between workstations, creating strict rules around how third parties can successfully be integrated and allowed inside your facilities, and limiting access to shared spaces such as kitchens, break areas, and gyms.

- **Shift Flighting**

Devise scheduling policies that introduce individuals or groups of employees to the workplace in staggered shifts and prevent large numbers of workers from being onsite at one time. Limit interaction between employee groups to isolate sickness should it appear. Stagger breaks so that large groups do not gather in break areas, kitchens, and lunch rooms or restrooms.

- **Workplace Precautions**

Communicate strong hand washing policies to employees and customers, and provide disinfectants and PPE such as face masks wherever possible. Masks help limit the transfer of disease particles between individuals.

- **Deep Cleaning**

Good hygiene is the best way to prevent the spread of disease. Create detailed plans for cleaning your facilities on a regular basis, disinfecting thoroughly all surfaces, workstations, tools, and other equipment. Prepare contractor lists to provide deep-cleaning services.

ACTIVE MONITORING

After workplaces reopen, limiting the spread of COVID-19 will depend on consistent testing protocols and active pursuit of possible cases of illness among employees, visitors, and third-party contractors.

- **Testing**

Scientists have so far developed several tests for the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. **Viral tests** can help determine if employees are carrying the virus—keep in mind that as much as 40% of the total number of people infected with the novel coronavirus do not display symptoms, but may still transmit it to others. **Antibody testing** is also becoming available to reveal whether individuals carry antibodies that suggest immunity to COVID-19. In many cases, antibody tests have not yet been fully vetted by health authorities and may require improvement over time. Managers should note that resources are limited nationwide and capacity for testing may take months to catch up with demand, so testing should not be considered a reliable cornerstone of your strategy.

- **Screening**

Other tactics, such as temperature checks, can help managers screen employees for possible illness. CDC guidelines indicate that workers or visitors who test at or below 100.3°F may be allowed entry. Questionnaires can help determine if employees have been exposed to the virus, while temperature checks provide a real-time evaluation of a worker's health before or during a shift. Create detailed response policies for instances of possible exposure or illness. Screening measures should also apply to third-party contractors who partner with businesses for on-site services, and contractors can be required to furnish a declaration of zero exposure or symptoms before being brought into your facilities.

All staff tasked with screening responsibilities must be provided adequate PPE, which includes the following single-use disposable items:

- Clothing protection: Impermeable gown or coverall
- Respiratory protection: Surgical face mask or NIOSH-certified N95 respirator mask
- Eye/face protection: Safety goggles or full-face shield

- Hand protection: Examination gloves with extended cuffs
- Shoe protection: Boot or shoe covers

- **Community Scanning & Thresholds**

Managers can use public health data to gauge safe limitations on staffing as COVID-19 cases rise and fall over time. Spikes in new case reports could mean increased risk to employees and their families based in the affected communities. Utilize the available data to create thresholds or threat levels of new case numbers compared to your total workforce that trigger scheduling changes or reduced production.

- **Contact Tracing**

Create plans to immediately isolate employees who test positive for COVID-19, removing the infected worker from the site and determining who else may be at risk of infection from that employee. This could include family members and people outside the organization as well as coworkers.

- **Resiliency Assessment**

Perform an assessment to determine how effectively employees and the organization are likely to weather the remainder of the crisis once work begins. This will help you prepare for unforeseen costs and circumstances.

PREVENTION AND SUSTAINABILITY

The transition back to “normal” business will likely take months or even years, depending on industry and operational limitations.

- **Vaccines and Treatments**

At this time, there is no vaccine or proven medical treatment for COVID-19, and these are unlikely to emerge until at least 12-18 months from the start of the pandemic. Managers should stay up-to-date with guidelines from public health officials and ensure the organization is ready to communicate new treatments to employees and implement recommendations at a rapid pace.

- **Ongoing Monitoring**

Managers should consider assigning a dedicated resource to departments and work sites to provide updates and data on the progress of the transition back to work.

VIRTUAL & ON-SITE INJURY PREVENTION SERVICES

Even in normal circumstances, injury prevention is an ongoing challenge requiring engagement with employees and a holistic focus on risk factors from body, behavior, and the environment. Organizational budgets are more strained than ever, and limiting the costs from workplace injuries will be key for enterprises looking to emerge from the transition back to work in good standing.

Injury Prevention by the Numbers:

- **\$80,000:** Direct cost of a single back injury claim
- **\$40,000:** Direct cost of a single RSI claim (repetitive strain injury)
- **\$170 billion:** Total costs from workplace injuries in 2018 (US data)
- **70,000,000:** Number of lost work days from workplace injuries in 2018 (US data)

SAFETY SUPPORT TO CONSIDER

Ramp up and reopen with a range of safety and injury prevention services that target the most common sources of risk, support employee wellness, and mitigate the cost burden of injuries. Though COVID-19 has and will continue to dominate conversations around restoring operations, these new concerns must be balanced against the persistent risk of employee injuries. Ensure your strategies are updated to account for the changes in the workplace that will result from the presence of the virus, such as social distancing and other adjustments discussed here. If your pre-COVID safety programs are not sufficient for addressing the increased risk that comes with inactivity and higher stress levels, you may need to consider augmenting your strategy with additional solutions. Safety resources should include both on-site and virtual support for employees, which can rapidly cut injury rates and offer return-on-investment of 300 – 600% or more per year. Injury risks will increase as facilities ramp up operations; the time for planning is now.

• Live Virtual Safety Training

Provide live technique, posture, conditioning, and pre-shift mobility training without the illness risk or space considerations that can accompany bringing non-staff providers into your facilities. Sessions include real-time correction of behaviors and movements that can lead to injury while also helping ready workers' bodies for the rigors of a shift.

• Virtual Ergonomic Evaluation

Connect your remote employees to a certified ergonomist via teleconferencing on an individual basis. Specialists will assess the employee's home workstation and help set up an ergonomically safe environment, helping mitigate the injury risk that comes with employees working at tabletops, counters, and couches. Consider desktop self-assessment and self-correction software that will allow these employees to learn best practices and help you identify those who need a virtual or in-person assessment.

• Work Hardening

Devise a return-to-work plan tailored to your business that will help employees adjust through the transition back to work and rebuild the strength needed for their jobs.

• Conditioning and Body Mechanics

Specialists provide on-site training to improve conditioning and flexibility while reinforcing best practices for high-risk movements.

• Pain Management

Hands-on soft-tissue therapy sessions can be configured to include stringent cleaning measures for the safety of your employees. Even a single 15-minute session can significantly reduce pain levels and address the causes of chronic pain.

• Mental Health & Wellness Apps

Nearly half of American workers have reported higher levels of stress and more acute mental health issues as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Employees can manage their stress and anxiety with a range of smartphone apps that provide emotional support and customized activities to help improve well-being. **The Lone Worker Well-Being App** offers e-learning courses on topics such as financial wellness, yoga, meditation, and more, encouraging self-care and positive health choices. Other apps to support overall wellness and mental health include Headspace, Calm, Talkspace, Woebot, and Youper, among many others available for both iOS and Android devices. Now is a perfect opportunity to merge your wellness initiatives with safety programming, as both will be interconnected for years to come.



Now is the time to invest in planning and proactive solutions to ready your organization for a successful return. Between tools like smartphone apps, virtual training, and ergonomic evaluations and ramping up on-site support, you can prepare your workers and facilities for a safe reopening and a successful relaunch.

DORN is here to support your enterprise as you plan for ramping up operations and restarting business, now through the end of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Contact us today to set up a free consultation.

Organizations and their employees across the country are hoping to safely get back to business. The transition back to work will be a challenge for all, and increased injury rates could come with devastating human and financial costs.





ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CDC Guidelines:

- [COVID-19 Symptoms](#)
- [Meat and Poultry Processing Workers and Employers](#)
- [General FAQs for Businesses](#)
- [Sample COVID-19 Preparedness Plan & Template](#)
- [Cleaning & Disinfection](#)
- [Cleaning & Disinfection for Non-emergency Vehicles](#)
- [Interim Guidance for Conserving and Extending Filtering Facepiece Respirator Supply in Non-Healthcare Sectors](#)
- [Community Guidelines for Suspected Exposure to COVID-19](#)
- [Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers Potentially Exposed to COVID-19](#)
- [Running Essential Errands](#)

Other Links:

- [OSHA Guidelines on Recordability](#)
- [How to Create a Safe Ergonomic Workspace at Home](#)
- [Reinforcing Health and Safety Practices with Virtual Solutions](#)
- [The Safety Potential of Workplace Technology](#)
- [The Dangers of Fatigue in the Workplace](#)



A Special Thank You to IPMI Institute.



If you would like to schedule a free consultation or demo about safety technology and injury prevention solutions, please feel free to contact us **info@dorncompanies.com** or call **(888) 870- 8828**.



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About DORN Companies

For over 20 years, DORN has led the cutting edge of workplace safety solutions, offering holistic, proactive strategies to help organizations in all sectors reduce injuries, cut costs, and boost productivity. With a whole-person approach to safety that evaluates Body, Behavior, and Environment, DORN deploys custom-built solutions based on trusted science and the expertise of a nationwide team of workplace safety specialists. Whether through ergonomic assessments, PainFree treatments, biomechanics programs, technology solutions or coaching and training, DORN solutions significantly enhance organizational efficiency and employee effectiveness while improving the overall culture of the organization. With an annual ROI of over 600% and a reach of over 100,000 employees, we have saved employers over \$100 million in workers' compensation and healthcare claims and costs.