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4 Vital Steps To Ensure Workplace Health and Safety

With a combination of technology and protocols, HR professionals can help ensure safe workplace conditions and foster revenue growth during the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines and beyond

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With a combination of technology and protocols, HR professionals can help ensure safe workplace conditions and foster revenue growth during the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines and beyond, writes RJ Frasca, vice president, product and marketing at EBI Inc.

The distribution of COVID-19 vaccines may soon reverse the rising tide of infection rates. Still, the threat of deadly viruses will likely continue to shape occupational safety efforts for the long term. In the meantime, organizations that provide healthy workplaces may gain a competitive advantage by enabling workers to work onsite, allowing them to focus on their performance and the bottom line.

The challenge for human relations leaders is to establish safe environments through operational guidelines and technology. They want to know: How can organizations ensure workplace health and safety during this and future pandemics?

Here are four key areas where return-to-work solutions help organizations mitigate employee infection risks, support ill workers, and respond swiftly and effectively to incidents or outbreaks.

1. Start Health Screenings at Home

Which is more cost-effective: responding to a viral outbreak or preventing a potentially contagious person from entering the workplace until they have a clean bill of health? The advantages of prevention are clear, which is why most employers urge workers to stay home when they feel unwell. During the pandemic, many organizations and building managers have also instituted health checkpoints at building entrances, denying admission to individuals who display COVID-19 symptoms.

A policy of turning away asymptomatic persons at the door fails to address some person-to-person transmission risks. Mass transit commuters may expose other riders, for example, or a sick person waiting to be screened for entry may infect employees, vendors, or visitors in the same line.

A more effective approach is to begin daily health screenings before workers leave home. This screening is as easy as logging into a website or mobile app and answering a few questions, such as the standard questionnaire created by the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* to detect signs of COVID-19. The employee can check and input their temperature or use a smart thermometer that transmits thermal measurements to their mobile device.

Suppose the screening suggests an elevated infection risk. In that case, the website or app automatically alerts an HR manager and guides the employee on the next steps to receive a medical diagnosis. Telehealth options reduce the chance of exposing others while obtaining medical attention and are incorporated into the screening app.

In the case of the system clearing the employee for worksite access, the employee

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is issued a scannable QR code or other unique identifiers to show when they arrive at work for quick passage through any entryway checkpoints.

2. Leverage Technology To Reduce Workplace Risks

In addition to verifying work clearances issued by remote screening systems, entry point screening provides an opportunity to administer a similar health check to visitors and ensure all building entrants are wearing the required PPE. Tools that help these procedures include touchless thermometers, QR readers, and scanners or kiosks equipped with thermal and facial imaging capabilities.

The technology to extend managers' eyes and ears, such as security cameras offer a starting point. This enforces physical distancing policies by monitoring workplace behavior. More effective systems work continually, without relying on a human operator to watch screens or perform spot checks. Options range from motion-activated counters that track occupancy in the rooms and corridors to facial scanners that verify mask-wearing and body temperature.

Wearable devices continually track each person's movements and alert individuals in real-time of unsafe social distancing. Systems that record each encounter's distance and duration are extremely beneficial in identifying repeat offenders or problem locations while providing a history that is invaluable in contact tracing.

3. Provide Individualized Tracking and Support

A safety platform that tracks and adjusts to each team member's health status helps individuals monitor themselves for symptoms as part of daily screenings and quickly access medical information and assistance when needed. Often offered as a mobile app, the same system serves as a single-source communications channel for the organization's health and safety messaging, including automated notifications.

The data collected through mobile apps or employee logins give management real-time insight into workforce conditions, including outbreaks, confirmed virus cases, hospitalizations, recovery progress, and persons isolating or recuperating at home. Systems assist individuals in obtaining medical information and assistance, filing insurance claims, or other reporting. Automatic prompts remind supervisors or HR to maintain contact with ill workers.

Personal histories in the system should reflect dates of diagnoses for the illness or tests confirming recovery. As vaccinations occur, update the system to note the vaccine received, dates of treatment, and any follow-up requirements, such as a second dose.

4. Manage Data and Analytics

Having a suite of tools to use is terrific, but they can be difficult to work with if they're disparate systems and you have no way to collect, read, integrate, and analyze the data. A health and safety solution should help management make sense of collected data and form strategic responses. A centralized Command Center solves this challenge by collecting and crunching real-time data so you can analyze it to create actionable safety measures.

A Command Center securely manages up-to-the-minute employee data and aggregates comprehensive risk mitigation information to determine threats to your organization's health. Here are some of the metrics a Command Center can calculate:

- Number of employees admitted (per day, per hour)
- Most popular entrance locations
- Patron demographics (employees, visitors, etc.)
- Body temperatures
- Average employee contact length (data collected from wearable distance monitoring devices)
- Average distance between employees
- Occupancy rates

User-friendly dashboards & real-time tracking aid visibility into behavior patterns requiring attention, while automatic alerts flag any outbreak or danger

Analysis reveals physical distancing patterns, such as length of interactions, spacing between employees, and average numbers of employee interactions

A Command Center can link to other tools like thermal scanners or mobile apps to compile data in one area

Ultimately, the ability to view comprehensive data like this improves leadership's decision-making ability in health and safety-related matters, makes HR processes and operations run more smoothly, and improves the overall health, confidence, and productivity of a company's employees. Used correctly, this new data can have a huge impact on an organization's ability to recruit and retain top talent while continuing operations as effectively as possible, no matter what health crisis it's facing.

For large organizations, technology is an essential ingredient of any risk management program. The best systems begin screening offsite, monitor movement, and behavior in the workplace, and provide employees and management with the tools and information they need to maintain health and safety as they pursue their shared mission.

Big Data

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RJ Frasca is Vice President of Product and Marketing EBI Inc., a leading background screening provider. Frasca brings over 20 years of marketing and product experience

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Do you still have questions? Head over to the Spiceworks Community to find answers.

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