

Wellbeing @ Work: A Brave New Era

A wellbeing guide for HR
leaders to support their team
returning to the workplace



A Brave New Era for Workplace Wellbeing



As Ireland's largest Health & Wellbeing provider, laya healthcare understands the complex Return To the Workplace challenges that HR leaders face. As the scale of these challenges become clearer, we have created this expert-led Wellbeing Playbook to arm HR leaders with practical tips and tools to help safely transition employees back to the workplace while overcoming the everyday HR challenges posed by Covid-19.



Aside from the many operational challenges, there's the significant human challenge posed too. Employees will have been affected by Covid-19 in different ways; some will have experienced sickness, others may have lost a loved one or struggled with juggling work and home life. Not everyone will want to return to the workplace. Never has the role of supporting employees' emotional and physical wellbeing been so critical for HR Leaders.

Never has the challenge faced in delivering that wellbeing been so great.

At laya healthcare, we're proud to play a role in helping HR leaders and employees navigate the complex transition back to the workplace, providing easy-to-access wellbeing supports and services to look after our members, always.

By making the wellbeing of your employees a priority in your Return To the Workplace strategy, HR leaders can seize the opportunity to rethink their wellbeing strategies in the face of the ongoing crisis and adapt to the evolving and complex needs of employees in a way that improves engagement, enhances culture and builds trust.

Our experienced team of wellbeing experts at laya healthcare are here to support you and to Look After You, Always.

Take care,
Sinead Proos
Head of Health & Wellbeing, laya healthcare

A C.A.R.E Approach to Return To Workplace Wellbeing



As we enter a second transition phase in Covid-19, where businesses are cautiously embarking on transitioning employees back to the workplace, consistent leadership and building trust is critical. Through their approach to wellbeing, HR leaders can play a defining role in helping employees feel valued and cared for when making their return.

The challenge of rethinking a new world of work and the workplace is daunting. At laya healthcare, we like to frame this challenge in the fundamentals of wellbeing. Here's our C.A.R.E. guide to successfully Returning to the Workplace:

- C – Communicate**
- A – Anticipate**
- R – Respond**
- E – Engage**



Did you know 9 in 10 Irish people worry about their mental and physical health during Covid-19?

Laya healthcare's research among 1,016 adults, carried out by B&A Research between 27th March and 1st April, reveals a nation struggling with remote working and coping with day-to-day life during COVID-19.

Communicate



A large swathe of the Government's Return To Work Safely Protocols concerns effective communication with employees. It's crucial to get this right. Many employees will not know what to expect when they return to the workplace, so it's important to set the scene for them to prepare them physically and mentally for what lies ahead. Will there be temperature checks at the entrance, will Covid-19 testing be required, how different will their desk set up be?

These may be small details, but they can have a major impact on the success of transitioning your employees back to the workplace. Here are five tips when it comes to communicating with your employees in a way that eases the transition:

1. Set clear expectations from the start: The Government's Return To Work protocols suggest setting up a COVID-19 Response Team, and communications should be top of the list of critical priorities of this team. Communicate clearly on what will happen before an employee returns to the office (pre-return screenings e.g. Covid-19 testing), when they return and the clear 'asks' of them in respect of what health and safety guidelines they will need to observe for the foreseeable future e.g. wear PPE at work, no hand shaking etc!

2. Say it again, and again. Repetition and clarity is powerful when it comes to communicating the basics of health and safety to employees including hand

hygiene and safe distancing protocols. The famous 'Rule of 7' suggests that a message needs to be heard seven times before a person takes action, meaning that repetition makes for effective communication.

3. Listen. Be consultative. Survey your employees to discover their biggest wellbeing concerns and barriers they perceive in their return to the workplace. Create actionable insights that address their primary concerns.

The key to a safe and continued return to work requires strong communication. Information and Guidance should be provided by employers to employees, which should include the signs and symptoms of Covid-19, how it spreads,

Communicate



cleaning routines and waste disposal as well as advice on hand and respiratory hygiene, physical distancing, use of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and work equipment. [Return to Work Safety Protocol, Government of Ireland, 2020]

4. Consider communications required for non-employees e.g. essential visitors, contractors.

5. Professor John Gallagher, Ireland's foremost expert on Occupational Health advises that HR communication around Covid-19 must be rooted in Occupational

Health and Safety legislation. Laya Healthcare's extended team of experienced Occupational Health Advisors work closely with Professor Gallagher to help businesses create their Return to Workplace Health & Safety Framework. These are aligned to guidance from health authorities including European Centre of Disease Control (ECDC), World Health Organisation (WHO), National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) and the Health Service Executive (HSE).



Anticipate



More clients are asking, 'how can we prepare our business and employees in the event of a second surge of Covid-19'? Another common question is 'when should employees return to the workplace?' and 'how can we make them feel safer in their return?'

An organisation's response in the grip of a crisis defines an employee's experience. Did they feel your organisation's initial response to Covid-19 was well-planned and implemented? Or did it feel rushed and panicked? Did they feel supported by their employer? Their experience directly influences trust in the leadership and the wider company culture.

No-one anticipated the scale of Covid-19 globally and the far-reaching disruption it would wreak on employees and businesses. HR leaders had to pivot and adapt quickly to help support employees as they transitioned to remote working or radically new ways of working. However, it's important we take the lessons forward and learn to strengthen Covid-19 prevention with better anticipation.

1. Identify priority steps to reduce risk of exposure to Covid- 19 in the workplace –

Occupational Risk Assessment Frameworks are key here, taking into account employee's individual risk factors (e.g. vulnerable workers who may have underlying medical conditions, older workers, carers) and other contingency measures. The fundamentals of reducing risk of exposure to Covid-19 are maintaining effective social distancing, introducing PPE for employees and visitors, and serving reminders on personal hygiene (hand washing, sneezing etiquette)

2. Pre-assessment Covid-19

screenings - prompt identification and isolation of individuals suspected with Covid- 19 is crucial to protect your





organisation and employees. More and more clients are looking for support in rolling out Covid-19 testing or offering antibody testing to their employees. Implementing self-declaration questionnaires is required for all businesses, carefully logged and assessed before employees return to the workplace. Other popular measures include temperature testing and providing PPE to employees. Return to Work Protocols from the Irish Government state that employees must complete Pre-Return to Work forms before they return to the workplace. Laya Healthcare is now offering a suite of pre-assessment services including Covid-19 and antibody testing.

3. Set employee expectations.

The workplace will be less recognisable to employees from when they last saw it and this can cause shock and concern on 'Day One' of reintegration to the workplace. Safe social distancing requires office layout changes, restaurants may not open or offer take away options only, large meeting

rooms may be closed and so on. Prepare your employees with a 'visual picture' of what the return to the workplace looks like.

4. Share a 'virtual walk through' to prepare them for the new office layout and explain how shared services like restaurants and toilets will operate in the post Covid-19 world. Otherwise share a Workplace Gallery, painting a clear picture that reinforces the priority being placed on ensuring their safe and healthy return to the workplace.

5. Carefully document your businesses 're-exit' strategy in the event of a second surge. How will the business continue to prioritise employee wellbeing if lockdown restrictions are re-introduced. Are your team enabled to access digital wellbeing services and supports?

[Click here for Resources on Supporting Employees on their Return to the Workplace](#)

Need our help with Pre Return to Work preparation or Wellbeing Risk Assessments including Covid-19 testing? Talk to your laya healthcare Account Manager today or go to layahealthcare.ie for more information.

Respond



HR leaders need to strike a delicate balance between the required operational response to Covid-19 and a more human response that speaks to the priority placed on emotional safety and wellbeing. How will you address employee concerns and anxiety around returning to the workplace? How can your response build emotional and physical resilience among employees and the leadership team?

Consider it like a house, the roof holds it all together underpinned by the supporting pillars of an effective operational and human response:

COVID-19 Response Checklist for HR Leaders

Operational Response

- ☐ Prepare a Covid-19 response plan and communicate to employees.
- ☐ Appropriate hygiene facilities in place including regular cleaning regime.
- ☐ Advice and training on health and safety protocols, processes, policies.
- ☐ Keep a contact/group log of employees to facilitate contact tracing.
- ☐ Update appropriate Covid-19 HR policies and procedures including sick leave policy.
- ☐ Establish pre return to work forms.
- ☐ Provide induction training for all workers.
- ☐ Implement temperature testing.
- ☐ Observe and facilitate physical distancing requirements - contactless payments, no hand shaking policy, staggered shifts/breaks.

Human Response

- ☐ Put in place mental health and wellbeing supports including occupational health services and Employee Assistance Programmes.
- ☐ Listen to employees and address their emotional and wellbeing concerns.
- ☐ Communicate clearly and give clarity to help employees understand and visualise what their return to the workplace will look like.
- ☐ Prioritise wellbeing and make digital access a priority for employees who want to continue to work remotely.
- ☐ Look after employees physical wellbeing - provide tips on staying active and connected- our Healthcoach benefit creates personalised fitness and health plans tailored to an employees individual needs.
- ☐ Offer more flexible working solutions where appropriate and possible eg. flexi-time, compressed hours, parental leave.

Did you know? Physical health problems significantly increase the risk of poor mental wellbeing. Your employees can now connect virtually to personalised health and fitness plans with our qualified Healthcoach team. In other good news, employees can also access Wellbeing Live an 8 week programme of daily 40-60 minute online health and wellbeing classes and seminars – all free, all live for all ages and fitness levels. Plug into incredible expert keynote speakers including Karl Henry, Sonia O'Sullivan and Aisling Larkin.

Engage



This is a challenging time for employees and they may require additional wellbeing support for them or their loved ones. The Irish Government has asked employers to put in place emotional wellbeing supports for employees who may be suffering from anxiety or stress when faced with the prospect of returning to the workplace.

Employers must prioritise the physical and psychological safety of their employees. Key to that is addressing mental wellbeing concerns and giving employees ready access to tools and resources needed to manage any 're-entry' anxiety.

Here are our top 5 tips to effective emotional engagement:

1. Return to the workplace courses for managers and leaders. Managers play a critical role in supporting employees' emotional engagement in the return to the workplace. By informing and training managers and leaders in your organisation, you'll better equip your entire organisation.

2. Introduce Return to the Workplace Digital Seminars to prepare employees for what to expect when they return to work, and build their emotional resilience – these can cover a range of subjects such as how to maintain social connections when remote working, overcoming anxiety, mindfulness tips and tips to remote working if they choose to not return to the office.

3. Make Employee Assistance Supports easy to access. Laya Healthcare members can access 24/7 Wellbeing Support Programme where they can get 'in the moment' help for any anxieties they're experiencing, or practical tips on how to cope with everyday challenges and juggles while remote working or transitioning back to the workplace.

4. Listen to your employees – run surveys and listening sessions with employees to find out the key emotional triggers or anxiety when returning to work, and what supports they would value the most when returning to the workplace or when choosing to remote work. Use the findings to drive actionable insights that make a positive difference to your wellbeing strategy and framework.

5. Identify vulnerable employees and provide a safe place for them to speak up in confidence if they need additional support when returning to the workplace. Good news - providing a confidential Occupational Health Service to your employees has never been easier, our team can help address absenteeism concerns, or manage return to the workplace care pathways for vulnerable employees who need additional emotional or physical support.

If you'd like to find out more about mental wellbeing training and supports your team can access as laya healthcare members, talk to your laya healthcare Account Manager directly or click [here](#) to find out more.

Key Challenges Experienced by HR Leaders



Through their approach to wellbeing, HR leaders can play a defining role in helping employees feel valued and cared for when making their return.

At laya healthcare, we recommend considering our **CARE** approach:

The Challenge		The Solution	
HR Leader Concern		Communicate	
How can I prepare my employees to return to the workplace?		Regular, consistent communication that gives clear instructions and clarity to employees is key.	
HR Leader Concern		Anticipate	
How can I prepare for the ongoing challenges of Covid-19 and what if there's a second surge?		Consider pre-return Covid-19 Risk assessments required to optimise a safe and effective return to work strategy. Help employees prepare mentally for what their return to a 'new normal' looks like.	
HR Leader Concern		Respond	
What are the Government protocols I need to be aware of when supporting employees in their return to work?		Consider the operational needs Vs human needs in your Return to Work response and wellbeing strategy.	
HR Leader Concern		Engage	
How can I adapt my wellbeing strategy and plans in light of the evolving needs of employees and ongoing disruption caused by Covid-19?		Listen to the emotional triggers and concerns of employees and action appropriate mental and physical wellbeing supports to build their resilience and create a psychologically safe place to work.	



If you would like any further information to support your employees when returning to the workplace, please contact your laya healthcare Account Manager or go to layahealthcare.ie

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