



Phase 1: Initial Re-Opening

Phase 2: Pre-Vaccine

Phase 3: Post-Vaccine

Phase 4: Future Preparedness

COVID-19 BUSINESS RESPONSE - PHASE 2: LEADING DURING THE PRE-VACCINE PHASE

EXPERTISE & SERVICES: [Health Plans](#), [Healthcare Technology](#), [Life Sciences](#), [Providers](#), [Public Health](#)

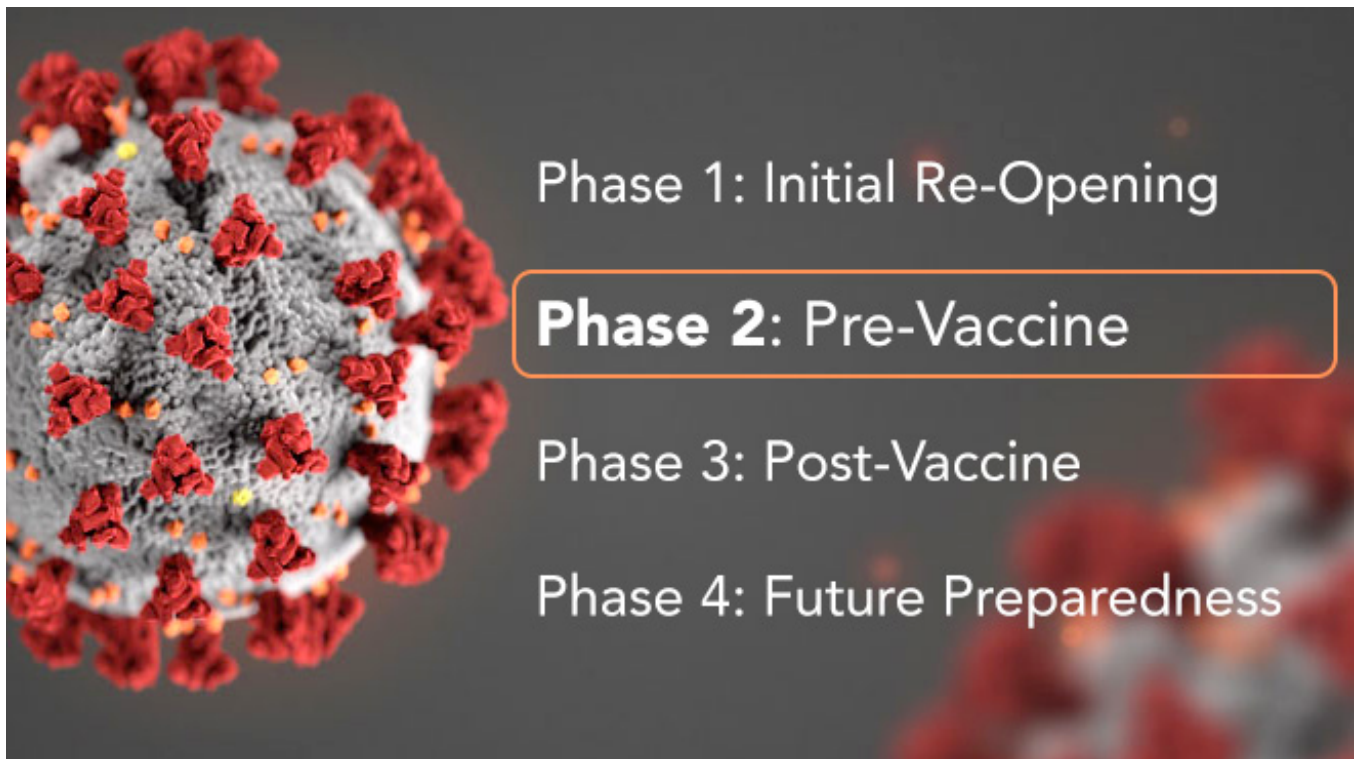
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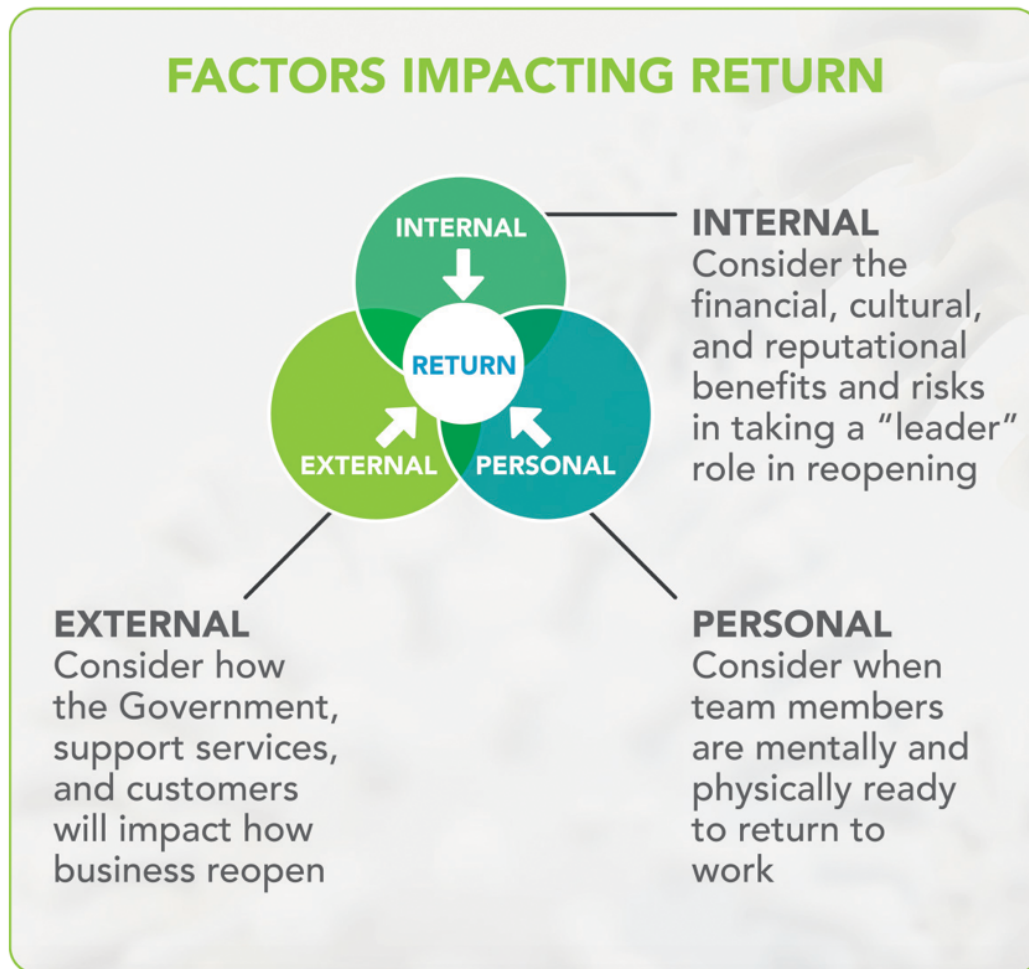
While still reckoning with the tragic consequences of the ongoing global pandemic, we are starting to see some light at the end of the tunnel. Today, most companies have a COVID-19 task force in place that includes, or at least reports to, senior leadership and has been responsible for assessing the vulnerabilities that were exposed by the expedited transition to a remote model. As an outcome of these assessments, COVID-19 task forces have been empowered to identify initiatives and sometimes strategic pivots that will be required to build a better, more resilient future.

As some companies have started the slow process of returning to the physical workplace, COVID-19 task forces are unlikely to dissolve. Some form of these task forces will likely continue; monitoring the fluid rules and regulations for re-opening (or future re-closing). These groups have a vital role to play beyond just logistical scenario planning. Many task forces will evolve, continually informing company strategy as COVID-19 cases fluctuate across different regions. Additionally, these task forces will need to learn and adapt as results of earlier decisions play out.

This insight focuses on what companies should be doing during Phase 2: Pre-Vaccine, the time-period prior to a widely available vaccine (or treatment).



As the previous [Insight](#) introduced, there are three factors to consider in COVID-19 response plans. These also apply to Phase 2:



Below are key questions for thinking about each type of readiness, and actionable examples of how companies might proceed to ensure each type of readiness during Phase 2.

EXTERNAL READINESS

External Readiness can be understood in terms of answering the following questions:

1. What government guidelines or regulations must we comply with at the national, regional, or local level to operate a physical workplace once it has re-opened?
2. What social, cultural, or economic impacts must we understand to operate a workplace once it has re-opened?
3. Which criteria (i.e., total number of local cases, new case rate, R number, number of deaths, etc.), if met, would constitute a new outbreak, and thus, require a re-evaluation of the workplace status?

Federal, state, and/or local government regulations and guidelines will dictate the criteria under which businesses can operate once they re-open. Whether these guidelines are related to physical distancing requirements, group size limits, entry checks,

or even changes to common/communal areas, in the U.S., the Federal Government has largely delegated responsibility for these guidelines to state and local governments. This presents a challenge for companies with operations in multiple states, each with their own circumstances and criteria for operating. Some states, like [New York](#), have clearly defined criteria based on metrics, while others have not been as explicit.

INTERNAL READINESS

Internal readiness can be understood in terms of answering the following questions:

1. What are the responsibilities of the employer to enforce appropriate distancing and hygiene for employees who choose to return to the workplace?
2. Once a physical workplace location has re-opened, how are policies and processes maintained and adjusted as external guidance and employee sentiment evolves?
3. What external and internal metrics will physical work locations use to measure their approach to re-opening and inform future changes to policies?
4. What role does “headquarters” play in decision-making versus localized leaders who can factor in community-level dynamics for a physical location?

It is in the best interest of employers to understand and take seriously their responsibilities pertaining to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of their teams, which may, at times, include enforcement of policies that team members are not adhering to. Not only are these responsibilities paramount as moral obligation, but also because employees will be both more motivated and more loyal in the future when they know leadership has prioritized their well-being during this time of crisis.

While no one policy or procedure on its own is enough to ensure a workplace remains COVID-19-free, actively communicating status against defined metrics and gaining buy-in to any changes in policy will promote good will with employees.

Further, since a lack of herd immunity¹ is likely to result in secondary spikes in COVID-19 cases, clear procedures that anticipate and can flexibly address future cases are vital and urgent. These procedures must be reviewed, adjusted and consistently communicated. Further, should new outbreaks occur, plans should be put in place for rapid and safe workplace closures, building on earlier lessons learned. Having these procedures in place will allow businesses and employees to prepare now, mitigating future shock and disorientation to employees and their families.

“[Strategies that have worked in hospitals] are like a drug cocktail. Its elements are all familiar: hygiene measures, screening, distancing, and masks. Each has flaws. Skip one, and the treatment won’t work. But, when taken together, and taken seriously, they shut down the virus.”

– Dr. Atul Gawande, MD, MPH, CEO of Haven

Examples: What should companies do to maintain a physical workplace once re-opened?

Testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor your onsite testing plan to confirm employees are in good health prior to entering the workplace on a daily basis. <p><u>Precautions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It should be noted that many COVID-19 tests available today have poor accuracy (some have 15% false negative rate – that’s really bad!), may take days to get results, or might require a full blood draw, and thus, limiting their scalability.^{3,4} Therefore, companies should search for a “gold standard” test (or combination of tests) that has been truly validated by the healthcare community before attempting to procure testing equipment and supplies at scale. It should also be known that antibody tests may not detect someone who is COVID-19 positive because it takes a few days for antibodies to show up after a person is infected.³ Taking temperature of employees is a reasonable measure but should not be viewed as a substitute of testing as current estimates are that less than 50% of COVID-19 positive patients initially present with a fever.⁵
Contact Tracing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor and adjust contract tracing protocols (for larger organizations). <p><u>Precautions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> While there are high hopes from technology companies for contact tracing technology (most notably the collaboration between Apple and Google), it won’t be enough on its own.⁶ A technology-only approach would require an estimated 80% smartphone penetration rate (U.S. is currently 72.2% smartphone penetration⁷) Even if the U.S. achieved the 80% smartphone penetration mark, it would require 100% compliance, which is unreasonable considering widespread privacy concerns from the general public). Therefore, contact tracing technology solutions need to be paired with humans trained in contact tracing.
Signage, Wayfinding, and Reminder Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use signage and digital campaign to remind employees of critical health & safety policies and procedures. Refine and practice common procedures such as evacuation procedures to ensure team members are comfortable with processes and procedures. Continue to build out policies for “edge cases” that weren’t critical for initial re-opening so that teams can be prepared for any event. Demarcate socially distanced spaces for employees to queue (e.g., while they wait to be tested before entering the building) or areas to be avoided. Determine enforcement policies for those individuals who are not adhering to policies and, most important, pull through those enforcement activities.
Supplies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Source a stock of preventative and protective workplace supplies such as hand-sanitizer, cleaners, gloves, and masks (N-95 respirators should be reserved for medical community and are not needed by the average person). When determining inventory, make every effort to ensure employees will have access to appropriate supply amounts, keeping in mind that other businesses need access to the same types of supplies during this time. Consider whether any traditional workplace supplies (i.e., pens, post-it notes, markers, etc.) need to be removed or have assigned owners in order to prevent cross-contamination.
Workplace configuration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure every other cubicle is closed off to ensure 6 ft / 2m buffer. Use plexiglass dividers between workspaces where possible. Ensure cleaning products (wipes, hand sanitizer, etc.) are accessible in all areas – from workspaces to dining to restrooms. Close common spaces as needed to prevent people from congregating. If food service must be open, operate it like “socially distanced take-out” with touchless payment. Ensure adequate ventilation as infection requires an infectious dose of SARS-CoV2 particles to enter the body (exposure to an infectious dose may be more likely in smaller, under-ventilated spaces).⁸
Cleaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institute enhanced cleaning practices to clean common surface areas, smaller spaces, and trafficked areas multiple times per day, such as doors, elevators, restrooms, printer room, vending machines, etc.

Note: Additional guidance on preparing facilities can be found at [aiha.org](https://www.aiha.org)

Part of maintaining the workplace once it has reopened includes ensuring that all team members are consistently aware of policies and procedures and that they understand their responsibility. Where possible, ensure training policies are managed online and are accessible for both employees and 3rd party companies. Continually refine and adjust policies as more is learned about COVID-19 and as government regulations evolve. Specific policies that should be actively managed include:

- Onsite scheduling (including staggered schedule where possible)
- Transit/Commuting and Travel
- Entrance & Exit Procedures
- Social Distancing and Hygiene, including any directive foot traffic pathing
- In-person meeting criteria including scheduling implications for “room changeover”
- Work from Home Policy
- Re-closure and/or reduced onsite presence

PERSONAL READINESS

Personal readiness can be understood in terms of answering the following questions:

1. What are the ongoing responsibilities of employees who have returned to a physical work environment?
2. What needs to be in place and operating consistently to ensure employees are mentally and physically able to commit to being onsite?

Examples: What are employee responsibilities in returning to a physical workplace?	
Training on Policies and Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take trainings and pledge to follow company policies and procedures related to COVID-19. • Adhere strictly to company policies and procedures. • Stay home if sick and self-quarantine for 14 days.
Personal Risk Profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand your own personal risk profile and ensure that risk profile does not become more relaxed than the company’s policies and procedures. • If you are living with someone at greater risk for infection, such as elderly or immuno-compromised individuals, work with manager on timing for returning to your primary physical workplace. • Disclose if you are living with someone who is not social-distancing or taking other necessary precautions (Note: This may be a departure from traditional practice, so management must pair this with psychological safety measures to ensure there is no retribution for disclosure and no stigmatism for being transparent about health status).

Examples: What needs to be in place to ensure employees are mentally and physically ready to work in a physical workplace setting?

Daycare / School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees that are parents have adequate daycare or schooling options that will allow them back in the workplace.
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A safe mode of transportation to get to and from the workplace is available to employee.
Wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing access to platforms that enable physical, social, and emotional wellness.
Psychological Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management must ensure there is an environment that is comfortable practicing social distancing and calling out others for non-compliance in a civil manner without fear of retribution.⁹ • Management must ensure there is no retribution or stigmatism for self-reporting a positive COVID-19 test result, else it risks those employees returning to physical work environments. • If there are no plans for lay-offs or furloughs, be transparent about that, so employees can focus on their work without additional worry. • Ensure employees are not forced to travel if they feel it would put them in harm's way.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT: HELPING EMPLOYEES ADJUST TO THE NEW NORMAL

The criteria above paint a very different workplace picture than the one employees were accustomed to. Adjusting to the new normal in the workplace during the Pre-Vaccine phase will require commitment on the part of both employers and employees, but it is employers who have ownership and responsibility over the change management process. Conducting the workday in an environment that is spaced out in unfamiliar configurations, includes physical barriers where none previously existed, and operates under entirely new protocols will be at a minimum distracting, and at worst distressing, for employees. Employers can manage the adjustment to the new normal by planning for and implementing a variety of change management tactics to decrease distraction and demonstrate support for employees during the adjustment period. Each company's needs will vary, but ideas include:

- Instituting virtual orientations to the workplace space and new protocols, familiarizing team members and giving them the opportunity for Q&A
- Asking managers to host 1:1 check-ins with their team members specific to the Return-to-Workplace adjustment
- Collect feedback from the overall employee population via surveys on a regular basis
- Invite ideas from employees who are willing to contribute to ongoing workplace planning
- Communicate in advance any upcoming changes as protocols continue to shift and evolve

The more involved and supported employees feel during the Pre-Vaccine Phase, the more likely they are to remain productive contributors even as work, social, and community environments demand continuous change and adjustment.

WHAT STRATEGIES SHOULD CARRY INTO THE FUTURE

While employee safety and readiness measures for consideration listed above should be of the utmost importance during the COVID-19 crises, organizations must not let the crisis distract from writing the next chapter of a business's growth and resilience.

In parallel to rolling out back-to-workplace readiness measures, leaders must conduct future-back strategic planning – that is, begin with the end in mind to envision what you want the company to be using in an appropriate time-horizon (e.g., 3-5 years). Focus on designing a business that will thrive in the “new normal” future, while avoiding the pitfall of simply trying to determine how the components of the existing business model can simply survive. Once the future vision is established and key strategic initiatives identified, the organization must make small bets to pilot these initiatives. Those that make bold decisions to pilot and adapt in a smart way will win the future.

Contact us at info@vynamic.com to explore if Vynamic can help your Return-to-Workplace initiative or broader strategic planning to prepare your organization for a more resilient future.

Interested in learning more?
info@vynamic.com | 888-VYNAMIC

END NOTES

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