



WORKING SAFELY IN OFFICES

Five steps to safety in the office and on site.



OLEG GEYLER

Partner at Bain & Company

As remote employees in Russia are coming back to their regular workplaces amid a still high risk of the coronavirus infection, businesses need to focus on ensuring the safety of their staff and customers. Lifting of the lockdown does not mean we should rush back to the office all at once. It is preferable to return staff to work in phases based on the need for the workforce, customer demand, local conditions and risks to individual employees.

Below you will find a list of comprehensive measures to help companies prevent the spread of COVID-19 at workplaces and a tentative action plan in case someone contracts the virus at work.

1. Social distancing

Maximum possible social distance comes first. At some of its sites, Volkswagen reconfigured workplaces to ensure a five-foot distance between workers who are also prohibited to pass material or tools by hand. Ford's US factories are experimenting with smart wristbands that vibrate when employees come within six feet of each other. Many companies use plexiglass barriers to enclose workplaces.

Then comes zoning. For instance, the US-based Materialise split the building up into zones, including entrances and changing rooms, to separate employees and ensure they will only come in contact with people within the same zone. In China, Cushman & Wakefield bought coloured carpets to create visual boundaries around desks.



Maximum possible social distance comes first.

Another measure is internal shift rotation, in particular for permanent standalone teams that can come to the office on alternate days and shifts. For example, BHP's Chilean office has split its employees into two groups that work on different rotations, with everyone staying at home on Friday to allow for office disinfection. On-site shifts are slightly different, with employees living and working in isolation. For example, some of SIBUR's sites introduced a shift camp arrangement, testing their staff for COVID-19 and providing them with residential facilities to stay away from the outside world, subject to their consent. However, this approach will work only if the disease has not yet found its way into the site.

LIFTING OF THE LOCKDOWN DOES NOT MEAN WE SHOULD RUSH BACK TO THE OFFICE ALL AT ONCE. IT IS PREFERABLE TO RETURN STAFF TO WORK IN PHASES

Meals should also be taken separately. The US-based General Mills has introduced a staggered lunch schedule for its units to prevent crowding at the cafeteria. Some Chinese companies have installed transparent screens at tables and use QR-codes to track dining locations and companions of their staff. In most cases, they are forced to extend cafeteria working hours or supply more take-away meals.

2. Hygiene

In many offices and retail outlets, people have already got accustomed to the routine hygiene practice, including sanitisers, personal protective equipment, and the need to wash hands more frequently and avoid touching one's face and eyes. Use of shared items should also be minimised. The Hong Kong Department of Health recommended that employees arrive at work dressed in the uniform rather than use lockers to change, and be banned from drinking tea or coffee or taking meals together. In China, Levi Strauss & Co now sanitises fitting rooms and clothes after each fitting.



In many offices people have already got accustomed to the routine hygiene practice, including sanitisers, personal protective equipment.

Many companies regularly clean surfaces and strive to keep non-automatic front doors open. People are advised to wear gloves and a face mask in an elevator and to ride it alone when possible, or take the stairs instead.

FORD'S US FACTORIES ARE EXPERIMENTING WITH SMART WRISTBANDS THAT VIBRATE WHEN EMPLOYEES COME WITHIN SIX FEET OF EACH OTHER

3. Safety of external contacts

To ensure employee safety, employers should minimise their external contacts by limiting visits, denying access to external staff and banning business trips. Some companies recommend holding business meetings outdoors.

Corporate vehicles have fewer seats, and people are prohibited from sitting side-by-side. If possible, employees are also advised to use their personal cars to get to work instead of going by public transport or taxi. For instance, Coca-Cola prohibits its delivery drivers from leaving the truck. VkusVill, a Russian food retailer, is promoting its Order and Pick Up service to enable customers to pick up the order collected by the staff at a check-out counter without walking around the store.

4. Identification of an illness

Companies should screen employees before and during the shift to identify those showing COVID-19 symptoms. The Chinese Foxconn is utilising infrared cameras to track body temperatures during the day, while others use infrared thermometers for the purpose. Some employees returning to the office undergo coronavirus testing. For example, the Emirates airline conducts rapid blood tests on all its staff and passengers prior to taking some flights.



Companies should screen employees before and during the shift to identify those showing COVID-19 symptoms.

THE CHINESE FOXCONN IS UTILISING INFRARED CAMERAS TO TRACK BODY TEMPERATURES DURING THE DAY, WHILE OTHERS USE INFRARED THERMOMETERS FOR THE PURPOSE

5. Sequence of actions in case of contagion

Companies should introduce a response procedure and an evacuation plan in case someone contracts the virus at work. Staff should also be trained to avoid panic and minimise the spread. If you suspect that an employee might have the coronavirus, isolate them in a separate room, provide them with personal protective equipment, follow the evacuation procedures and be ready to provide medical assistance if needed. General Mills prepares a list of replacements in case all who had contact with the sick person need to be isolated. South Korea tests all those who stayed close to the sick person in public spaces (e.g. restaurants).

But the most important thing in the transition period is communications. You should regularly educate your staff, among other things, by using visuals and conducting online training sessions to raise their awareness and make them stay home if they show even the slightest symptoms of infection. People will follow all these measures only if you provide them with an explanation.

Source: [Vedomosti](https://www.vedomosti.ru/management/blogs/2020/05/13/830159-podgotovit-personal-vozvrascheniyu-mesta) (https://www.vedomosti.ru/management/blogs/2020/05/13/830159-podgotovit-personal-vozvrascheniyu-mesta)