



Preparing for the ‘New Normal’

Key questions and recommendations for the post-emergency phase of COVID-19.

EMPLOYER READINESS ASSESSMENT

2023 EDITION

ORGANIZING PARTNERS



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Keys to Success in the New Normal

Information, Preparation, Flexibility & Adaptability



WELL INFORMED

Your company's ability to respond to fast-changing conditions depends on timely access to key **information**.



EQUIPPED TO RESPOND

Businesses that are **prepared** for a new surge of cases and ready with **flexible** policies can maintain greater confidence in their return-to-work protocols. And they can better **adapt** to local conditions, whether they improve or worsen.



GET STARTED

Use our assessment tool to **assess your company's readiness** to respond to the changing landscape of COVID-19 and future pandemics. Find helpful tips to **bolster business resilience** and tap into our recommended resources.



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SECTION 1

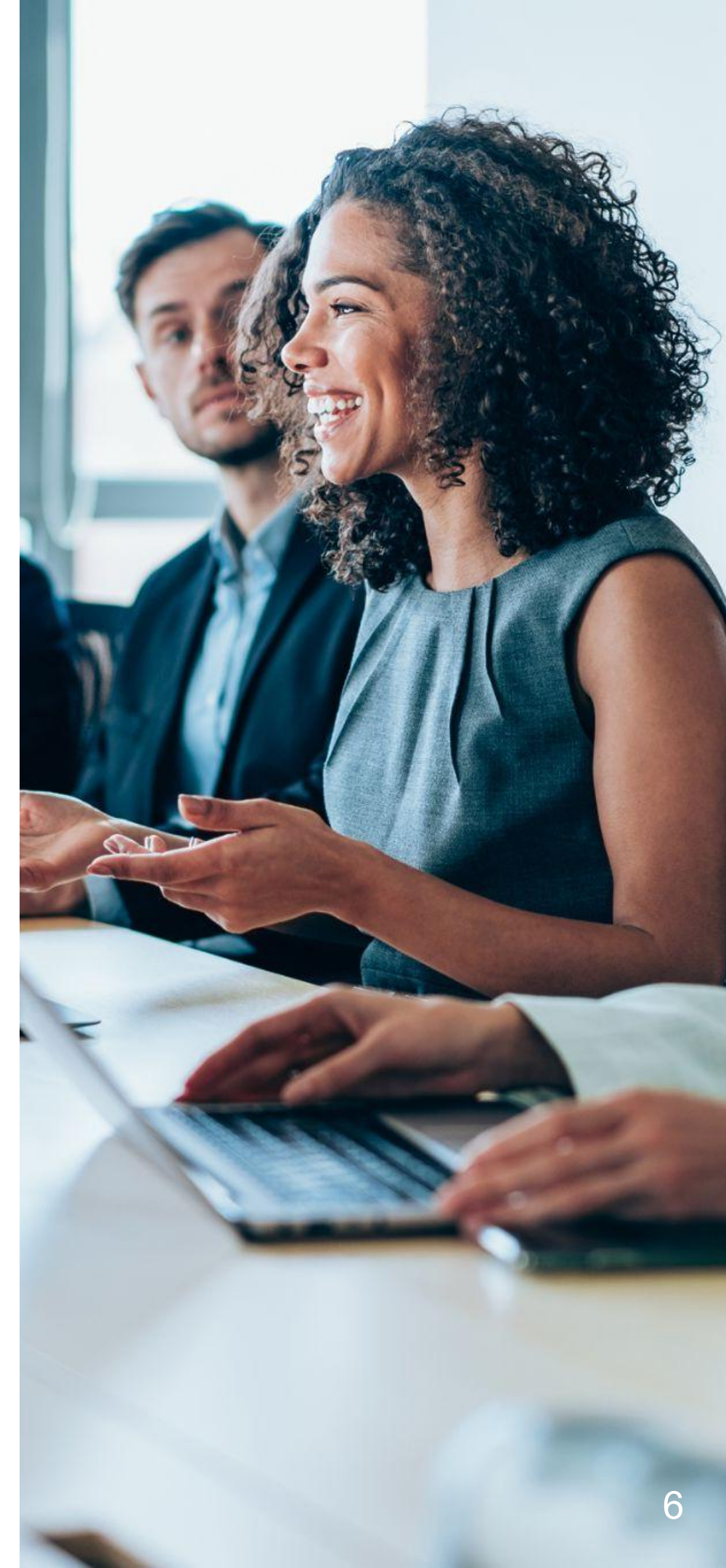
Assessing Your Company's Readiness

Is Your Company Informed?

Use the latest CDC data-tracking tools and other key metrics to make informed decisions.

ASSESS YOUR INFORMATION

- ☐ Are you using the CDC's updated [COVID-19 Community Levels](#) to track your local risk and set safe rules for masking?
- ☐ What is your local community vaccination rate?
- ☐ Do you know your employees' vaccination status?
- ☐ Are you tracking the risk level in communities where employees may be traveling for work?
- ☐ Are you reporting cases/deaths to your public health department?
- ☐ Is your company in regular touch with your local public health department for up-to-date information on community resources and opportunities to collaborate on community health?



Is Your Workplace Prepared?

Encouraging vaccinations and preventing the spread of infectious diseases like COVID-19 remain essential to a healthy workplace. You can support both goals through your company policies and workplace operations.

ASSESS YOUR POLICIES

- ☐ Are you continuing to supply vaccine/booster education and correct misinformation?
- ☐ Are you providing information to employees that helps them know their risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and how to access treatment?
- ☐ Do you offer paid sick leave to allow workers to stay home whenever they feel unwell or test positive for COVID-19?
- ☐ Do you have a company vaccination requirement?
- ☐ Do you offer paid time off for employees to get themselves and family members boosted/vaccinated?
- ☐ Does your company have a non-retaliation policy and anonymous process for workers to report safety concerns?

ASSESS YOUR OPERATIONS

- ☐ Have you upgraded indoor ventilation and/or filtration?
- ☐ Does your company have a supply of tests for workers?
- ☐ Do you have a stock of high-quality masks to distribute as needed?
- ☐ Could you re-institute social distancing if needed?
- ☐ Are your sanitation protocols up to date?
- ☐ Have you reduced frequent touchpoints with hands-free solutions?
- ☐ Is your workplace prepared to offer on-site booster shots if they're necessitated by a new variant?

Are You Prepared to Support Your Workers?

Supporting your employees—on mental health, new caregiving responsibilities at home or continued vulnerability to disease—will be important to your business’ ability to adapt to future conditions.

ASSESS SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

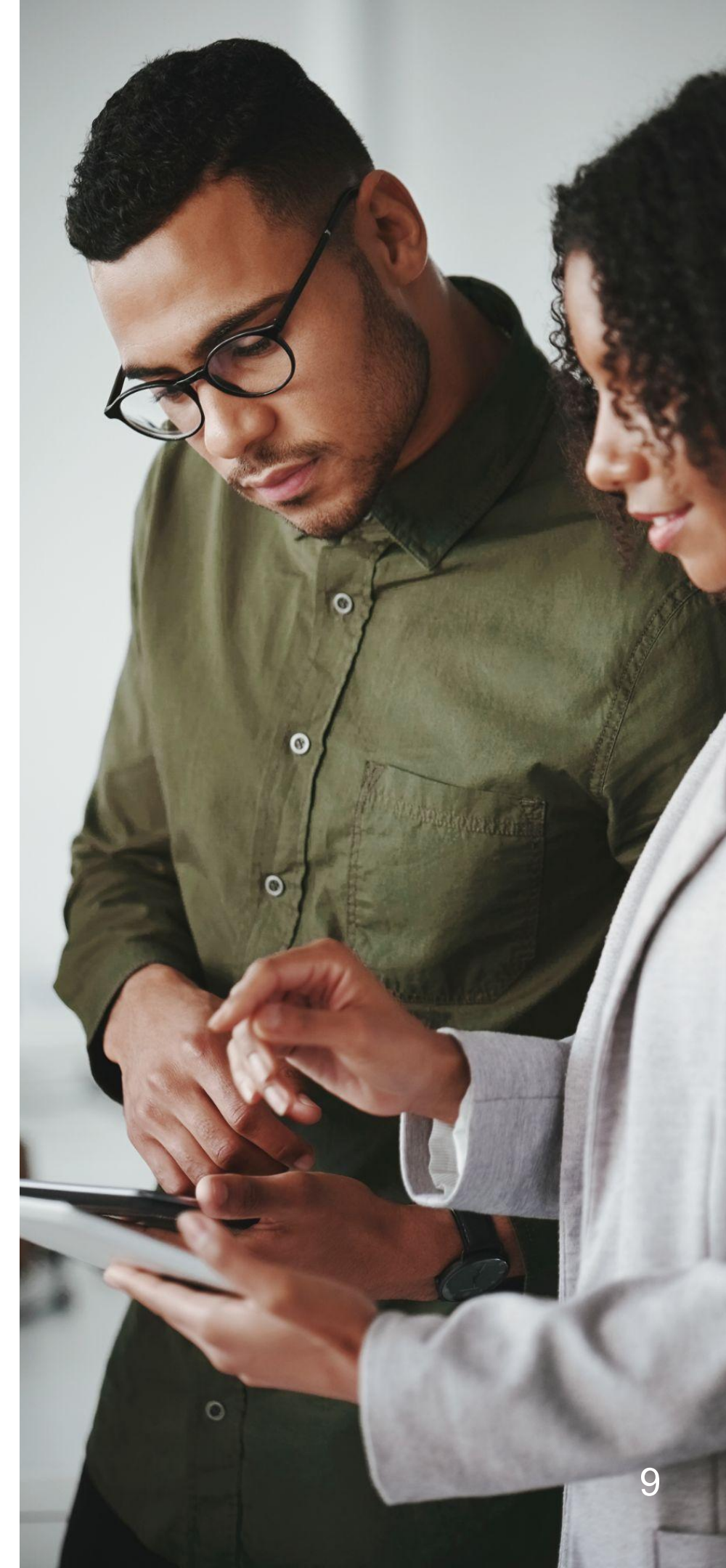
- ❑ Does your employer-sponsored health insurance plan maintain testing coverage or limit cost-sharing for COVID-19 services?
- ❑ Are you regularly communicating about your benefits with employees, including changes to COVID-19 testing and treatment coverage?
- ❑ Do your employees have access to affordable healthcare through your company’s health insurance?
- ❑ Are you supporting employees who wish to continue wearing masks?
- ❑ Do you have a policy to address employee concerns about working in unsafe conditions?
- ❑ Are you seeking and incorporating employee feedback—including from workers representing disproportionately affected populations—into your planning for future health challenges?
- ❑ Do you offer support/flexibility for employees with ongoing family care responsibilities?
- ❑ Does your company have employee resource groups (ERGs) for diverse populations, mental health or other affinities?
- ❑ Are managers trained to check in on employees’ mental well-being and needs?
- ❑ Does your insurance plan comply with the Mental Health Parity Act?
- ❑ Does your company offer an Employee Assistance Program? Have you assessed its offerings to meet post-pandemic mental health challenges?

Are Your Plans Flexible?

Businesses that plan for flexibility in their operations will be best positioned to survive and thrive through changing conditions.

ASSESS YOUR FLEXIBILITY

- ☐ Are you inviting your workers to help identify creative and flexible solutions?
- ☐ Are employees cross-trained in other company functions in the event of an outbreak at your workplace?
- ☐ Are you prepared to hire temporary workers to supplement your workforce if employees get sick?
- ☐ Are you prepared to move part or all of your workforce to a remote/hybrid model?
- ☐ Are any operations appropriate to move outdoors?
- ☐ Are you working with other your local businesses to identify cooperative and creative solutions during a public health crisis?



Adapt to Changing Conditions

LOW COMMUNITY LEVEL

Use the CDC's COVID-19 Community Level tracker and other key metrics to evaluate and inform changes in your business response.

IF:

- ❑ Community spread and hospitalization rates are low

AND:

- ❑ There are no outbreaks among your workforce



THEN:

- ❑ Help your employees keep their vaccinations up to date
- ❑ Maintain indoor air quality improvements
- ❑ Support employees who choose to keep wearing masks
- ❑ Consider making masks available on site for high-risk workers or those who choose to wear a mask
- ❑ Share CDC isolation guidance for workers who test positive for COVID-19, and masking guidance for those who were exposed to the virus

Adapt to Changing Conditions

MODERATE COMMUNITY LEVEL

Use the CDC's COVID-19 Community Level tracker and other key metrics to evaluate and inform changes in your business response.

IF:

- ❑ Community spread and hospitalization rates are low

OR:

- ❑ Your workforce vaccination rate is low
- ❑ There is an outbreak among your workforce



THEN:

- ❑ Make masks available for high-risk workers
- ❑ Consider expanding hybrid or remote work options
- ❑ Help your employees keep their vaccinations up to date
- ❑ Upgrade indoor air quality (ventilation and/or filtration)
- ❑ Share CDC isolation guidance for workers who test positive for COVID-19, and masking guidance for those who were exposed to the virus

Adapt to Changing Conditions

HIGH COMMUNITY LEVEL

Use the CDC's COVID-19 Community Level tracker and other key metrics to evaluate and inform changes in your business response.

IF:

- ❑ Community spread and hospitalization rates are high



THEN:

- ❑ Consider requiring masks indoors for all workers
- ❑ Pivot to remote work where possible
- ❑ Discuss individualized accommodations with employees who are at high risk for serious illness
- ❑ Consider limiting company travel
- ❑ Help your employees keep their vaccinations up to date
- ❑ Upgrade indoor air quality (ventilation and/or filtration)
- ❑ Share CDC isolation guidance for workers who test positive for COVID-19, and masking guidance for those who were exposed to the virus



SECTION 2

Tips For Business Resilience:

Targeted Actions to Take Now



Prioritize Vaccination & Treatment

The risk of getting very sick from COVID-19 isn't the same for everyone. Vaccination is key — and so is treatment for those who are eligible.

VACCINATION & TREATMENT TIPS

- Help employees keep their vaccinations up to date by encouraging—and making it easy—for them to get the new COVID-19 booster.
- Encourage employees to get boosted now (and before May 11) while vaccines remain universally free and easily accessible, regardless of who is providing them.
- Share information to help employees understand their risk for getting very sick from COVID-19 and how to access the effective, oral, at-home treatments available to those who are eligible.
- Engage your ERGs to share the latest information about boosters and treatments, answer their questions and address any unique access challenges their members may face.
- Offering paid time off for vaccinations and recovery reduces barriers for low-income employees. Provide PTO for employees to accompany eligible family members, too.
- Employers and managers should approach employee concerns about vaccinations with empathy, but “bridge” back to core messaging about the effectiveness of vaccines.
- Consider offering on-site clinics for routine vaccinations, including both the flu and COVID-19.



Improve Air Quality

Since COVID-19 spreads through the air, improved air quality will help keep your workplace safe going forward.

AIR QUALITY TIPS

- Look for ways to increase outdoor air inside by opening doors or windows, creating cross-breeze, opening outdoor air dampers on HVAC systems to reduce air recirculation, or adding window fans.
- Inspect and maintain exhaust ventilation.
- Run the HVAC system at maximum outside airflow for 2 hours before and after the workplace is occupied.
- Use portable HEPA fans or filtration systems where possible.
- Consider installing upper-room ultraviolet germicidal irradiation (UVGI) systems to clean the air where ventilation and filtration options are limited.
- Consider modifying outdoor spaces with expanded seating and weather protection to allow for workers to utilize them for breaks, meals or gatherings.
- Assess the layout of indoor workspaces including worker activity and movement and implement filtration and ventilation to ensure “clean” to “less clean” directional airflow.



Build Surge Capacity

Learn from shortages in tests, masks, and labor supply by building your own capacity.

SURGE CAPACITY TIPS

- Stock sufficient supplies of high-quality (N95 or KN95) masks to distribute to workers if needed.
- Keep supplies of rapid antigen tests to support your company's ability to test employees regularly.
- Free at-home tests are once again available by mail from [CovidTests.gov](https://www.CovidTests.gov). Every U.S. household is eligible to order four free tests. Promote this resource to your employees and remind them when to use their tests.
- Make sure employees know that until May 11, all health insurance plans are required to fully reimburse the cost of up to eight at-home COVID-19 tests per month for each person on the plan. Encourage employees to make use of this universal coverage before any changes set in after May 11.
- Maintain your knowledge of which teams and operations can work remotely and refresh any processes you need to activate remote work.
- Cross-train employees to enhance institutional knowledge and build flexibility for illness and other absences. "T-Shaped" employee training prepares employees to maintain a depth of knowledge in their core responsibilities, and incorporate a broad working knowledge in other aspects of the company.
- Ensure that staffing agencies or other labor providers are aware of and compliant with any workplace policies, including mask or vaccination requirements.



Support Employee Health

Your people are your most important asset. Employee resilience is essential to business resilience.

MENTAL HEALTH TIPS

- Listen, validate, and address employees' concerns about returning to work.
- Normalize talking about mental health in the workplace.
- Train managers to recognize warning signs of mental distress and refer employees to resources.
- Invest in and promote quality mental health benefits.
- Implement policies to reduce burnout.
- Build work systems that promote worker autonomy and flexibility.
- Create programs to foster belonging.
- Challenge your insurance providers to add or enhance mental health offerings. Promote the available support internally and streamline the process for employees to access it.

PHYSICAL HEALTH TIPS

- Provide paid sick leave so workers can stay home when they feel unwell or test positive for COVID-19, per CDC guidance.
- Explore policies to support employees impacted by long COVID. Long COVID symptoms may qualify as protected disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act.
 - Support access to treatment. Use of antiviral treatments may reduce the risk of long COVID. It may also alleviate long COVID symptoms.
 - Consider how you can help employees manage their symptoms as they return to work.
- Promote annual flu shots and vaccination for infectious diseases beyond COVID-19.
- Consider investing in an employee wellness program.



Support Employee Well-Being

Look beyond the workplace to
secure the health of your
employees.

COMMUNITY WELLNESS TIPS

- Your employees and their families' health is strongly influenced by the health of their community. Reach out to your local public health department to understand community health challenges.
- Explore targeted areas of investment to improve community health.

FINANCIAL WELLNESS TIPS

- Finances are the top cause of employee stress. Financial wellness starts with competitive, equitable and livable wages.
- Enhance financial wellness through benefits that support financial stability and long term health, such as quality health insurance, retirement benefits, tuition stipends or loan forgiveness, and access to financial planning programs.

EQUITABLE SUPPORT TIPS

- Provide flexible work arrangements as needed for immunocompromised workers, and evaluate your workplace compliance with the American Disability Act.
- Consider establishing Employee Resource Groups or affinity groups to establish community, create safe listening environments and meet the unique and diverse needs of your workers.
- Consider expanding family-friendly benefits such as flexible work schedules, paid sick leave for family care, elder care networks or child care subsidies to support working caregivers.

A woman wearing a face mask, with a blue overlay and text.

SECTION 3

Recommended Resources

HEALTH ACTION ALLIANCE RESOURCES

- [Act Fast Against COVID-19](#)
- [Boost Up for Winter Toolkit](#)
- [2022 Flu Season Employer Toolkit](#)
- [Pandemic Preparedness Plan for Businesses](#)
- [Manager's Conversation Guide](#)
- [Decision Tool for Business Leaders](#)
- [Workplace Mental Health Playbook](#)
- [Tips to Support Anxious Employees Returning to the Office](#)

Find more at [**healthaction.org**](https://healthaction.org)

SPONSORED RESOURCE LINKS



- [COVID-19 Preparedness Plan](#)
- [Know Plan Go Employer One-Pager](#)
- [COVID-19 Insights for Employers](#)
- [COVID-19 Educational Pamphlet](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [CDC Ventilation in Buildings](#)
- [Upper-room UVGI systems](#)
- [Guidance for Building Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [How to Get Your At-Home COVID-19 Test for Free](#)
- [Seven Ways Businesses Can Align with Public Health](#)



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sign up for updates at healthaction.org.

Questions?
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