



COVID-19 BUSINESS CONTINUITY RETURN TO WORK CONSIDERATIONS

BACKGROUND

As the spread of the COVID-19 virus begins to approach more manageable levels for public health systems, governments have begun shifting their focus toward the economic element of the pandemic. Of principal concern within the United States is how to navigate the risk acceptance of reopening ailing businesses. How successful communities are in safely emerging from shelter in place orders amid continued COVID-19 transmission will be a seminal question over the coming months.

The Trump Administration has made clear that all aspects of the COVID-19 response will be locally-managed, state-led, and federally-supported, which means that businesses should anticipate a broad range of operating environments, from cautious and iterative re-openings to more accelerated liftings of restrictions. This diverse policy landscape will require organizations to develop their own enterprise risk mitigation strategies for returning to work safely and effectively.

OUR VIEW

The Chertoff Group (TCG) draws upon its extensive leadership experience across government and industry to help organizations mitigate risks, manage crises, and guide Clients through turbulent environments to achieve business growth and resilience. Using our proven risk management methodology, our Firm takes an approach with Clients that is relationship-driven and solutions-oriented. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, TCG has stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Clients to not only minimize business impact, but identify opportunities for positive business outcomes, more robust operations, and better positioning to weather future crises.

As governments begin lifting “stay at home” orders, TCG recommends that businesses carefully assess the following “return to work” considerations to mitigate risk today and build resilience for a potential second wave this Fall:

1) *Securing a personal protective equipment (PPE) supply chain*

The availability, distribution, and proper usage of PPE vis-à-vis the workforce will be a core component of organizational resilience for the foreseeable future. Businesses will need to be proactive in securing a PPE supply chain and plan for setbacks. Many of the component parts of PPE are sourced internationally, and visibility into the supply chain has been limited. Businesses with trusted PPE suppliers should seek to strengthen those relationships rather than take a more transactional approach. Organizations lacking a PPE supply chain should undertake proper due diligence efforts to avoid falling prey to scams and price-gouging, both of which have been rampant issues throughout the pandemic.

2) *Utilizing proven decontamination solutions with prophylaxis properties*

The need for decontaminating public spaces will expand significantly as shelter in place orders and restrictions on movement are lifted. Businesses across industries will need to account for an increase in cleaning expenses to reduce the transmissibility from surface exposure. Businesses operating in higher risk sectors, such as airlines,

hotels, and casinos, are likely to face greater scrutiny from the public with respect to maintaining hygienic environments, necessitating a scalable solution to decontamination, such as contracting with a decontamination service provider.

3) Implementing a workplace capacity management strategy to facilitate physical distancing

Physical distancing has proven an effective means to limiting virus spread, and businesses will need to develop a practical approach to managing physical distancing in the workplace. The popularized open office concept will likely require some degree of modification to reduce exposure, such as rearranging desks farther apart, erecting room dividers, or installing cubicles. Businesses that have operated successfully while teleworking should continue remote work after restrictions are lifted, as such caution will benefit both the organization and the community.

4) Offering testing and participating in contact-tracing programs

Properly scaled COVID-19 testing has been one of the main stumbling blocks in the pandemic response. As testing becomes more broadly available, businesses should consider how testing fits into their employee health care programs and return to work plans. Similarly, while much work remains to fully implement contact tracing, effective tracing brings much needed visibility and situational awareness. Challenges will remain to implementing contact tracing, but businesses would be wise to consider options for understanding tracing options for their workforces.

5) Investing in technology to increase pandemic resilience while also improving business operations

Reliance on technology has only increased during the pandemic, and the time is now to advance previously considered technologies to improve business operations while also building resilience. Just as digital solutions have enabled effective teleworking, technology will enhance the viability of returning to work safely. Retail businesses and restaurants—industries that quickly adapted to the pandemic by re-directing focus to e-commerce and food delivery apps—will likely see continued interest in online ordering and greater demand for contactless payment. Touchless, user-driven technologies for identity management, access control, and inventory management should be considered for investment. Entrances at manufacturing plants or corporate headquarters may benefit from adding thermal cameras to existing access control systems to monitor temperatures.

6) Redefining corporate “duty of care”

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders could generally approach duty of care from a high level and advise departments on its broad application across the enterprise. Aside from developing evacuation procedures to assist those with limited mobility, workplace violence programs could be designed largely without special considerations for individual employees—an active shooter is an equal threat to everyone in the office. COVID-19 has proven insidious for those who are older, immunocompromised, or possess underlying health conditions. Leaders are unlikely to know their employees’ personal medical history, but they should account for vulnerable demographics. This duty of care reassessment will help inform re-openings and longer-term workforce policies. Such considerations are important for addressing reputational risk as well. Decisionmakers should emphasize the wellness of the workforce as a driving component within their organization’s corporate social responsibility model.

For more information on the Chertoff Group’s services, please contact: info@chertoffgroup.com