RETURNING TO THE WORKPLACE

A GUIDE TO RETURNING TO CUIMC AFTER COVID-19 FOR MANAGERS

BY CUIMC Human Resources (Updated May 14th, 2020)
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If, after reading this guide, you have any further questions or requests, please email cumchr@cumc.columbia.edu or your Senior Human Resources Business Partner. If you have any COVID-19 specific questions, please email covid19questions@cumc.columbia.edu. As information evolves, the information below will be updated.
**Purpose**

The purpose of this guide is to provide managers at Columbia University Irving Medical Center with considerations and resources to help employees within their span of control with the transition back to the workplace following the modification of on-site reporting procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Introduction**

Thank you for your commitment to Columbia University. Returning to onsite work is essential for CUIMC to continue our missions of providing the finest clinical care, cutting edge research, and educating the next generation of leaders in science and medicine. Your role as a manager is essential to a successful transition back to onsite work.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created fundamental changes in the workplace. Although we would prefer to go back to business as usual, some of the changes brought on by the crisis may become permanent and require long-term adjustment. As faculty and staff begin to return to work onsite, we will ensure that we continue to support all staff with this transition.

Employees may be impacted differently during this pandemic and as a result, may have different needs as they transition back to the workplace. Some may choose to keep their personal lives private while at work and we may not know the extent an employee is struggling. In some cases, employees may continue to experience personal challenges or exhibit signs of grief or other forms of trauma. It is incumbent upon managers to create a safe space for their staff and help employees with the transition back to work.

Below are resources that will help you and your employees with the transition back to work such as workplace safety and benefits including child care.

**CUIMC COVID-19 Resource pages**

To keep abreast of COVID-19 University-related updates, please visit the following pages:

- [covid19.columbia.edu](https://covid19.columbia.edu)
- [humanresources.columbia.edu/covid19](https://humanresources.columbia.edu/covid19)
- [research.columbia.edu/covid/covidhub](https://research.columbia.edu/covid/covidhub) (uni required)
- [fpo.cuimc.columbia.edu/covid-19-resources](https://fpo.cuimc.columbia.edu/covid-19-resources) (uni required)

**Return to the Workplace Considerations**

Return to workplace considerations for managers will be based on University policies and procedures including the following:
Remote Work
- Continue to allow telecommuting where possible and/or staggering shifts.
  - Governor Cuomo’s regional [Guidelines for Re-Opening New York](#) provides details relating to governmental procedures and advice
  - [Guide to Managing Remote Teams](#)

Employee Benefits
- Prepare to answer leave/accommodation requests and questions regarding childcare, [EAP](#), etc. (visit the Back-up care section below for more information)

Workplace Safety
- Continually check Environmental Health & Safety (first link below) and other applicable University resources as guidelines may change:
  - [Environmental Health & Safety Covid-19 Guidance](#)
  - [Latest Updates](#)
  - [Health Guidance](#)
- Additional information and guidelines for outpatient practices are available from the Faculty Practice Organization.
- Provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), disinfectant spray or wipes, and hand sanitizer to employees and encourage employees to use the disinfectant for any surfaces (e.g. doorknobs, the mouse, counters, copiers, etc.).
- For assistance with how to don and doff Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) please see this video: [https://player.vimeo.com/video/400247789](https://player.vimeo.com/video/400247789) and [this job aid](#). Make sure staff familiarize themselves with this.
- When removing face coverings, do not touch eyes, nose or mouth or the front of the mask. Wash hands with soap and water or apply hand sanitizer.
- Promote proper handwashing techniques, enforce workspace cleaning procedures (consider signage that complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act) as a reminder of these practices as well as revised occupancy maximums for shared spaces. Make sure employees have information in case they are exposed e.g. employees should contact their health care provider for assessment.
- Communicate that employees are to stay home if they feel ill. If they have been exposed, follow the exposure-response plan.
- If an employee confirms they have tested positive for COVID-19, handle the situation with sensitivity and confidentiality. Immediately alert your department HR contact (or your Sr. HR Business Partner) for guidance on how to comply with University procedures and relevant regulations (i.e. CDC, HIPAA, etc.).
- Face covering must be worn over the mouth and nose in all public areas and shared workspaces. Face covering is not required in private offices when the door is shut and there is no other occupant.
- Adhere to at work social distancing guidelines / rethink or reconfigure workspace and workstations. The CDC suggests:
  - Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms’ length) from other people
  - Do not gather in groups (if you must have a meeting, keep it small)
  - Stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings
- Evaluate existing furniture layouts and configurations in medium to low-risk areas such as around office workstations to encourage physical distancing during working hours.
Return Procedures

- Phase employee return and if possible, take into account issues facing employees including childcare or eldercare needs and needs for medical accommodations. If possible, return those staff at a later date, consider alternate shifts, compressed workweek, etc..
- Consider establishing a rotating shared office space wherever possible to accommodate employees who currently work in cubicles.
- Staff may ask for a leave of absence or an accommodation. To learn more about COVID-19 Leaves of Absence and Accommodation requests visit this website which covers the following topics:
  - Sick leave/Medical leave
  - Absence to care for a sick family member
  - Absence to care for a child
  - Medical accommodation
  - Quarantine order from state or local health authority

Effective Communication

- Keep employees abreast of New York City guidelines and ensure they are aware of their respective return to the workplace plan.
- Ensure directives are clear and simple so that employees understand them.

Guests and Deliveries

- Access for non-employees to any CUIMC space will be strictly limited.
- All guests and delivery vendors should be approved and notified in advance that they must wear appropriate PPE when entering any CUIMC building.
- Faculty and staff will need to make arrangements to pick up any items that are delivered by sending someone to designated check-in points.

If you have any questions regarding workplace considerations, contact your Senior Human Resources Business Partner. As information evolves, the information above will be updated.

Back-up Care

As we begin to return to work onsite, staff may experience issues with childcare or eldercare. The Back-Up Care Advantage Program®, provides care for adults/elders, children, or yourself when normal care arrangements are interrupted or when short-term care is required but you still need to perform your work responsibilities. For these situations, Columbia University has contracted with Bright Horizons Family Solutions to provide access to 150 hours of back-up care. If you want to learn more visit the Adult and Elder Care website from the Office of Work/Life or contact your Sr. HR Business Partner.
Common Signs of Stress in Employees

The following may be indicators that an employee is struggling with their efforts to adjust to the workplace. Be alert to these potential signs:

- Isolation
- Comments suggesting the presence of suicidal ideation
- An exaggerated expression of shame or guilt
- Persistent lack of trust.
- Hypersensitivity to criticism
- Irritability or anger: verbalized or expressed through gestures.
- Difficulty establishing boundaries with others
- A tendency towards victimization
- Absenteeism or presenteeism
- Somatization: nausea, insomnia, headaches, loss of appetite or fatigue
- Decreased performance at work

Common signs of bereavement, grief, and loss

As described in the CUIMC Coping with Grief – A Resource Guide, grief is a natural human adjustment process. If any employees display one or several of these signs below, we must communicate the availability of resources and benefits.

**Physical Reactions**
- Fatigue
- Insomnia
- Headaches
- Upset Stomach
- Loss of appetite

**Emotional Reactions**
- Anger and irritability
- Grief and sadness
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Apprehension

**Cognitive Reactions**
- Confusion
- Lack of concentration
- Recurrent thoughts
- Intrusive memory (re-experienced parts of the original trauma)
- Hyper-vigilance

**Behavioral Reactions**
- Emotional outbursts
- Avoidance of others
- Impaired work performance
- Increased alcohol consumption (or other substances)
- Decreased interested in usual activities

The Coping with Grief Resource Guide linked above offers several Columbia, New York Presbyterian (and other) resources for counseling, pastoral care, emotional support, etc. for all CUIMC employees. All individuals grieve and respond to trauma in different ways and on different timelines. The best thing to do is to communicate that you are available to your staff if/when they are ready and willing to discuss their emotions and experiences as well as provide them with the necessary resources.
What managers can do

Managers play a key role in helping their team members successfully reintegrate into their roles. Below are actions managers can take to achieve this goal:

- **Contact employees before their return to work.** An employer may avoid contacting a worker who has experienced a traumatic event, believing that it is more respectful to stay out of their private life.
- **Meet with the employees on during their first day back at work.** This meeting should be private and confidential. It is important not to avoid employees, nor underestimate the impact the crisis may have had on them. While it is appropriate to avoid asking for specific details, you can ask open-ended questions.
- **Be attentive to employees’ personal needs.** Experiencing a traumatic event can harm an individual’s sense of competence and security. Being empathetic, transparent, and genuine can help employees’ safely address these concerns.
- **Have a reintegration plan.** Hold a “reorientation” session to reconfirm roles and responsibilities and set a flexible plan for what can be accomplished based on what they believe they can achieve in the weeks ahead and work unit needs. Revisit the plan regularly and make adjustments where needed.

What managers should avoid

- **Do not try to force information from your employees.** This could result in anger, distrust, and emotional distance. Waiting until someone is ready to handle the situation will allow for more open and honest communication.
- **If your employee tells you that they do not want to talk about their circumstance, be respectful of their wishes.** When your employee is ready to seek support and talk with co-workers, Let the employee do this based on their own timeline and readiness.
- **Do not make the employee’s grief about you.** It is natural to want to empathize with a co-worker especially if you have experienced similar trauma. However, your offering of unsolicited advice may not be what the employee needs in the moment.
- **Do not assume there is one universal way to grieve or respond to trauma.** At CUIMC we are proud of our cultural diversity and celebrating it through our Employee Resource Groups. It is important to respect how each employee chooses to grieve.

What to do if an employee’s performance is impacted

Policies related to respecting an employee’s privacy and offering resources related to grief, trauma, or the EAP are required regardless of the situation. If an employee’s performance begins to suffer and continues to decline, gently start a dialogue about their performance and ask what you can do as a manager to assist them. As the situation progresses, follow the normal guidelines related to privacy until the employee is ready to seek help, request an accommodation, or their performance begins to improve. If the pattern of poor performance continues and you reach a decision that action must be taken, contact your Senior HR Business Partner for next steps.
Recognition and remembrance

As President Lee Bollinger succinctly wrote, “We have lost family members, neighbors, and now at Columbia, we have lost valued employees and one of our own students. Of course, the mortality rate nationally and globally is staggering, but the shock is always greater when the losses occur within your own home and community.”

There are ways your department or business unit can honor your colleagues, family, and friends who passed away as a result of COVID-19.

• Moments of silence in the Department
• A memory wall to record funny and sentimental anecdotes that remind you of the deceased
• Staff check-ins with affected employees by peers and managers
• Meetings to memorialize the deceased by discussing how much they meant

If your staff asks for your support resources

• [Well-Being Programs and Services](#) and [Employee Assistance Program](#)
• [Emotional Wellbeing Resources](#)
• [CopeColumbia](#) (to request a group, email Aaron Vieira at av2548@cumc.columbia.edu)
• [CUIMC Coping with Grief – A Resource Guide](#)
• [Discover Your Benefits](#) (offers many coping resources offered by Columbia)
• [Headspace](#) (a science-backed meditation and mindfulness app free for New Yorkers)
• Digital Health Apps for emotional wellbeing such as [Meditopia](#)
• [Mental Health Support New Yorkers](#) (facilitated by the New York City Mayor’s office)
• [Employee Resource Groups at CUIMC](#)
• [Mental Health/Emotional Support Resources for Co-workers – Articles and Tip Sheets](#)
• CUIMC webinars:
  o Communicating During a Crisis: [May 19](#) & [May 21](#)
  o Crisis Decision Making: [May 26](#) & [May 28](#)

Summary

Returning to onsite work is essential for CUIMC to continue our missions of providing the finest clinical care, cutting edge research, and educating the next generation of leaders in science and medicine. We must ensure that a return to the workplace is both a physically and emotionally safe endeavor for all employees. This guide should equip you with a tailored approach to handle employees who may be grieving, coping with trauma, or in need of benefits information and other resources. The information provided above should help you plan for transitioning back into office life successfully. If you have questions please contact your Department Administrator, Departmental HR representative, or the CUIMC HR [Senior HR Business Partner](#).