

## READINESS TO WORK CHECKLISTS FOR EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in layoffs and extended time off work for many Vermont workers. While sheltering at home, workers may have contracted COVID-19, experienced other medical or mental health conditions, or encountered alcohol or drug problems. They may have become deconditioned relative to the physical demands of their jobs. These factors put workers at increased risk of injury or illness when they return to work.

As companies restart their businesses, they cannot afford to lose productivity. It is also employers' responsibility to ensure that workers are safe to return to work, while following privacy and disability laws. Two **Readiness to Work** checklists are attached – one for you, the employer, and one for your employees. The employer checklist will help you follow best practices for creating a safe return-to-work environment. The employee checklist will help workers determine if they are ready to return to work and if they are not, to identify steps to become ready.

Make sure all employees know that they are welcome to share their answers with you, but only if they feel comfortable doing so; it is not required. The purpose of the employee checklist is for workers to build self-awareness about their own readiness to work.

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**READINESS TO WORK - EMPLOYER CHECKLIST**

- Create a safe workplace.** Ensure that your facility operations are consistent with state regulations and best practices for restarting. Guidance is constantly changing. Stay up to date with CDC, OSHA, EEOC, state guidance, and with employer resources at the [Vermont Department of Labor](#) and [Agency of Commerce and Community Development](#).
- Communicate workplace changes.** Be sure employees understand the new work environment, including rules, procedures, and any changes to their jobs. Make sure they have completed [VOSHA required training](#).
- Assess infection status.** Implement consistent and confidential testing procedures.
  - For employees who had COVID-19 or were exposed to a COVID-positive person, a letter from a medical provider is required stating whether they are infectious and if they will require job modifications.
- Maintain confidentiality.** Although you can ask workers about COVID symptoms during the pandemic, you cannot ask for other medical information unless it affects job performance. You also cannot disclose the identity of COVID-positive workers. All medical records must be kept in confidential files separate from personnel records.
- Assess work readiness.** Distribute the VT RETAIN 'Readiness to Work' checklist to all employees. Do not require employees to disclose their answers, but do encourage them to tell you if the results raise concerns about their work safety or the safety of others. The goal is to increase self-awareness about readiness to work. If someone reports that they do not feel ready to work, the next three items on this list are some ways to help. You or your workers may identify other ways to help.
- For physical jobs, start slowly.** Take a special look at jobs that require physical exertion. You can encourage safe physical exercise in the weeks before return to work, offer fitness sessions before shifts, and/or start with limited hours or lighter job tasks and build to full work. You can request a fitness for duty letter from a medical provider if your employee has a new or worsening medical condition that might affect their ability to work.
- Provide mental health and substance use resources.** Mental health symptoms have spiked during the pandemic, and substance use has increased. Offer your employees assistance through an Employee Assistance Program. Use flyers, email blasts, or other business-wide communication to let all employees know that they can call the Department of Mental Health to find a therapist at 211 or the peer support line at 833-888-2557.
- Update job accommodations.** Be sure that workers with work injuries or disabilities have safe work releases. For those who had an existing work injury or medical accommodation prior to sheltering at home, confirm that their work release is still appropriate. You can request an updated release from their medical provider prior to return to work.
- Do you need more help? Not sure what to do?** Contact VT RETAIN at [Labor.RETAIN@Vermont.gov](mailto:Labor.RETAIN@Vermont.gov), or call 1-888-356-0487.

## READINESS TO WORK - EMPLOYEE CHECKLIST

After staying at home during the COVID-19 pandemic, many people are ready to get out of the house, get back to work, catch up with their co-workers, and collect a paycheck again. But periods of inactivity and stress, combined with more difficult access to health care, can lead to both mental and physical deconditioning and can put you at risk for injury or illness at work. Planning ahead will help you successfully return to work and stay at work. This checklist is for your information only. **YOU DO NOT NEED TO SHARE IT WITH YOUR EMPLOYER UNLESS YOU ARE COMFORTABLE DOING SO.** Thinking about your answers to the following questions will help you understand if you are ready to return to work and what steps you can take to get ready.

- Were you sick with COVID-19 or were you exposed to someone who had it?**  
Ask your medical provider for a note stating if you are infectious and if you need any job modifications.
- Are you at high risk for severe infection?**  
If you have any conditions on the [CDC list](#), check with your medical provider and your employer about ways to protect yourself.
- Did you have any new illnesses or injuries during the shutdown?**  
If a new injury or illness could affect your work, talk to your medical provider or employer about how to do your job safely. If you need any help in order to do so, ask for it.
- Did problems with alcohol or drugs develop or get worse during the shutdown?**
  - o Talk to your medical provider about how to safely decrease consumption or quit.
  - o Call the peer support line at the VT Recovery Network, 802-808-8877 from 9:00 am to 9:00 pm.
  - o Be sure you can be sober at work.
  - o Take advantage of substance use resources available through your employer or the state.
- Are you mentally ready to return to work?** Anxiety and depression can be triggered by the stresses of isolation, illness, finances, family issues, etc.
  - o Contact a counselor or your medical provider for help. You are not alone. Many people experienced anxiety, depression, stress and other mental health symptoms during the shutdown.
  - o Self-care is not selfish. Make a plan to take care of yourself and stay healthy.
  - o To find a therapist, call the Department of Mental Health at 211, or call their peer support line at 833-888-2557.
- Does your job require a lot of physical work?** If you didn't exercise during the shutdown, the time to get in shape is *before* you return to work.
  - o Start gradually increasing your activity.
  - o Be sure you can easily do your work before signing up for a full day. If you can't, talk to your medical provider about how to get in shape quickly and safely. Consider talking to your employer about working fewer hours or doing lighter job tasks for the first week or so.
- Do you need more help? Not sure what to do?**  
Contact VT RETAIN, a return to work program within the Vermont Department of Labor  
[Labor.RETAIN@Vermont.gov](mailto:Labor.RETAIN@Vermont.gov) or call 1-888-356-0487