COVID-19: A Return to Work Readiness Checklist

As you plan for the return of employees and visitors to your place of work, it's essential to understand that things are not going back to the way they were before. Things we wouldn't have thought of as important or feasible have become part of the fabric of our everyday lives. And while things will continue to change, it is fair to say that there will certainly be a new normal.

As you've started to adjust to the new normal, now you are faced with the next focus: ensure employees and customers stay safe as you begin to re-emerge from the COVID-19 crisis. Here is a preparedness checklist:

☐ Communicate the Plan

It's important to communicate to employees so they know what to expect when returning to work. Not just what they will be required to do, but also how are you keeping them safe. And these days, transparency is key. Customers will also want to know what your employee policies are as they evaluate if they will consume your products, shop at your store, or eat at your restaurant.

☐ Review New Compliances: I-9s, EEO-1 Reports & Insurance Policies

As new policies and compliances emerge to mitigate employment issues due to COVID-19, stay up to date with policy changes. Ensure your company is using the new I-9 Form (release date: 5/1/20). If your company has under 500 employees, review your EEO-1 Report and resubmit according to the government's guidelines. Companies with under 500 employees are subject to the FFCRA bill, which provides two week's paid leave for employees who need to take time off due to COVID-19. Review insurance policies and discuss open enrollment plans with employees. Ask to hold an informational webinar with your insurance providers so employees have the chance to ask any health insurance related questions during this time.

☐ Payroll Benefits

Your employee's benefits are the highest priority during this time. Ensuring your team understands their policies and has access to information like unemployment and insurance benefits is vital to your continued commitment to each employee. Review with your employees how they can access payroll benefits and provide open communication to address any concerns or questions they may have.

☐ Paid Time Off Policy

Consider updating your paid time off policy, or how employees may use their paid time off. Be prepared for employees to become ill with COVID-19 and how your company will respond to their needs of recovery and quarantine. Allow for flexible policies so employees can stay at home to tend to ill family members. Review your policies and the public health recommendations to ensure your company is following the suggested guidelines.

☐ Pre-Screening & Self-Screening

The CDC has urged companies to require employees to pre-screen, or self-screen, before returning to the workplace. Employees should be urged to take their temperature daily and monitor their symptoms before entering the workspace. If employees have a fever or begin to display symptoms, they should immediately be sent home and all surfaces should be disinfected.

☐ Staggered Office Schedule

As the country plans to re-open, guidelines to maintain a 6-foot distance from others is still crucial. With employees returning to the workplace, social distancing can be difficult in crowded spaces. Offer a staggered office schedule to reduce the number of employees in the building at once. Before you return work, determine how many people can be in the workspace at once and still main 6 feet apart. For instance, if you work in a call center – there should likely be a desk between each employee. Then, divide your employees into teams and assign days of the week for each team to be in the office.

☐ Limit Congregating

While the break room and kitchen may have been a haven prior to COVID-19, these spaces can prove to be extremely tricky as we continue to practice social distancing. Consider limiting the number of employees that can congregate in shared spaces. Eliminate shared kitchen items like utensils, glasses and mugs. Urge employees to not share food. Stagger breaks so employees each have a time where they know they can take a break and not overcrowd each other.

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☐ Visitor Policy

While traveling may be on hold for many companies, there are many types of visitors that we tend to see in the workplace. Whether it be package deliveries or even food deliveries, now is the time to revisit the visitor policy. Reduce the number of visitors that can enter the workspace and define which visitors are acceptable. Since contactless delivery is on the rise, a "drop at the door" policy can help eliminate the number of visitors. If your company continues to hold client visits, be sure to maintain a 6-foot distance within the office.

☐ Hiring Guidelines

Revisit your hiring guidelines to accommodate for social distancing. Hold initial interviews through video conferencing platforms, like Zoom, to reduce interactions with new people. If in-person interviews must be held, be sure to hold them in a room where you can remain 6-feet apart; or suggest a meeting space offsite, in open air. Be transparent on how your company is handling COVID-19 and how the company will plan to proceed with hiring. Consider how onboarding can be done remotely if needed and have a plan for new employees to get up and running in their own space.

☐ Update Employee Handbook

Since we may not snap back to a workplace that looked exactly like it did prior to COVID-19, updating your employee handbook can help to reduce confusion among your workers. Additionally, as new hires join your team – having an updated employee handbook that reflects new policies will critical to their success during this time. Keeping a digital copy of the handbook can provide quick answers and is also easier to update as policies may continue to change.
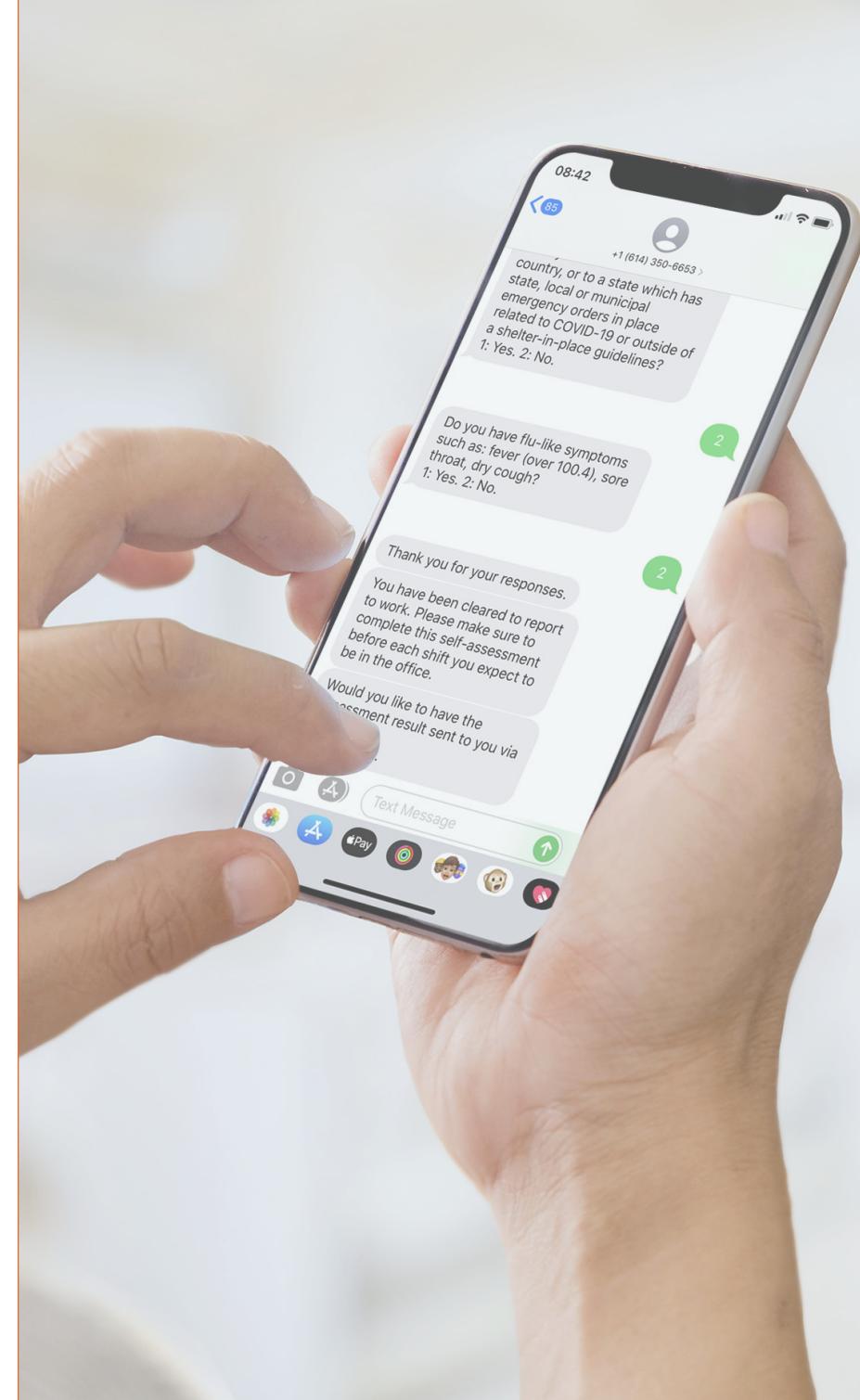
☐ Face Masks

Some companies are requiring employees to wear facemasks to help stop the spread. Determine how a facemask policy could help your employees feel safe and protected. Consider testing facemasks to ensure they won't interfere with daily job tasks before implementing a facemask policy. As an employer, you can help issue facemasks, or approve facemasks, to employees.

☐ Do Not Share Equipment

Any device that has close contact with the nose or mouth should not be shared among employees. Equipment like headsets, or telephones, should only be used by one employee. Take the extra step and have employees wipe down their equipment with disinfectants before the start of the shift and at the end.

☐ Discuss Cleaning & Airflow with Facility Maintenance

Review the building's cleaning policy and schedules. If shared spaces are not being disinfected regularly, you may need to work with your own team to ensure these surfaces are routinely being cleaned. Discuss with facility maintenance on how you can increase air exchanges in rooms to ensure proper ventilation and clean air flow.

☐ Support Hand Hygiene

The health and safety of your employees is critical as we return to the workplace. Provide plenty of tissues and no-touch disposals. Ensure employees have adequate access to soap and water, or hand sanitizer that's at least 60% alcohol. Strategically place hand sanitizer and disinfectant to encourage employees to practice proper hand hygiene throughout the day.

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Astute is here to partner with you every step of the way.

Taking these steps will be important for companies that are now under stress and needing to be more diligent than ever, but also more efficient. Using AI and automation can help deliver on both aspects. Here's how Astute can help:

Get the Word Out

Use a virtual agent on your website, intranet, or via SMS that provides the answers to customers and employees and their most common questions. It is easy to update so you can always make sure to be giving the most accurate information.

Provide Health Screenings

By leveraging AI, health screenings can actually be made quite simple to administer and to engage with. From the employee side, they would access the bot in the employee portal, on the website, or through SMS. They walk through a brief series of CDC recommended questions and are then given further instruction. For example, "You are cleared for work" or "Please contact your supervisor for additional instruction". Very similar can be setup for customers or visitors to your place of work.

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Have the Data Needed to Make Good Decision

There have been a number of stories in the news about companies who are caught off guard by an outbreak in their facility. Things are tough enough right now; nobody needs this additional worry. With Crisis Management AI, you can get ahead of this in three ways. First, collecting the information about employee health prior to working, will help identify issues and trends early. Second, it allows you to make decisions or change current processes based on information that is at your fingertips. Finally, it gives you the ability to quickly and easily make adjustments to processes and policies based on those decisions and get that information communicated to both employees and customers. If there is an unfortunate situation that occurs with illness at your facility, the only thing worse is to let rumors spread versus getting the information out and explaining how it will be handled. We are all doing our best in these times, reduce your risk by having the right systems in place.

Be Able to Plan for the Future

While there are a lot of unknowns about this situation we are in and what will happen going forward, we can be sure that there will be lasting effects and that we should all be prepared for something like this to happen again in the future. In fact, there seems to be at least 6 identifiable phases. The first was the start of the pandemic, second was the shelter-in-place, third is the re-entry/reopening of the economy, fourth will likely be a resurgence of the virus, fifth being longer term social distancing policies and finally a state where a vaccine is available. If we think about those phases over the next couple of years, it's incredibly important that businesses put into place the necessary framework to respond in each phase. At Astute, our Crisis Management offering is being built to ensure you are ready as these next phases come and have the flexibility to react quickly and keep employees and customers informed while leveraging automation to keep associated costs in check.

Want to find out more about how Astute's Crisis Management AI and Health Screening Chatbot can help you prepare now and reduce risk in the future?
Schedule a consultation today.