



## COVID-19 and Mental Health



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### RETURN TO WORK ANXIETY

After more than a year of working remotely, some employees have concerns about returning to the office and many are experiencing return-to-work anxiety and stress when contemplating returning to their buildings. Some psychologists are calling it “re-entry anxiety.”

There are very few experiences in the world that everyone shares and pandemic has been something that everyone can relate to, even though our individual experiences in this situation are unique. There is ongoing uncertainty and even anxiety around what the future will look like.

As we have collectively adapted to the unsettling effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have all had to change our behaviors in life and at work to adapt and succeed. For those privileged enough to have not lost their jobs, or worse, they unquestionably had to make substantial changes to the way they accomplished their work in order to stay productive and competitive in the new operating environment.

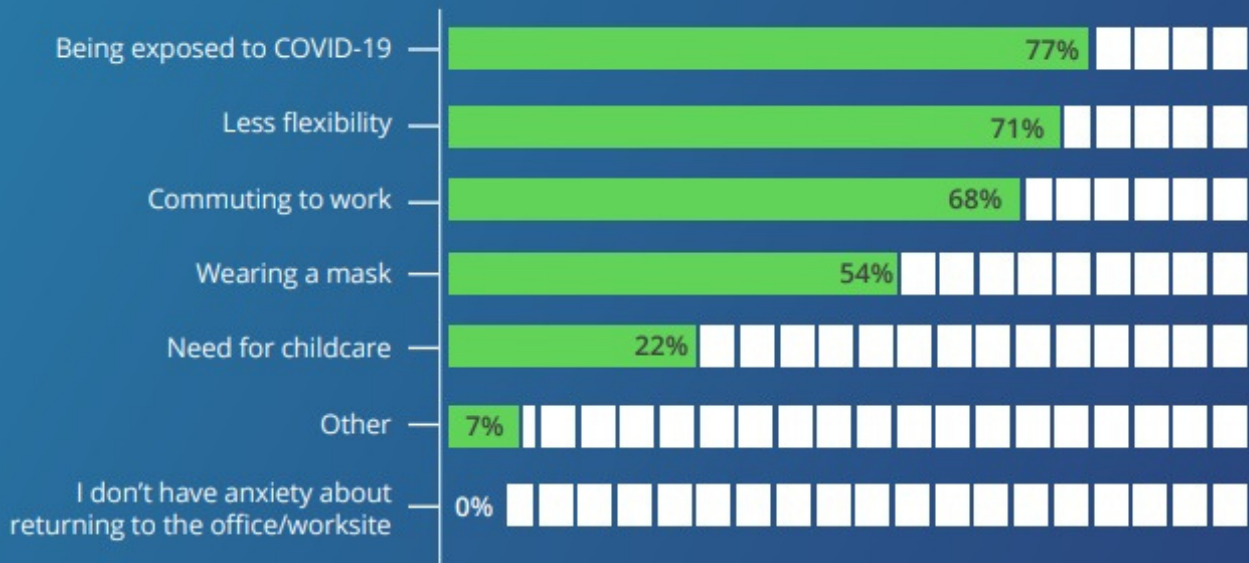
As COVID vaccines become increasingly available with the number of cases dropping, organizations and businesses are beginning to think about the future. While the vaccinations have proven effective, returning to work after COVID can still cause some stress. Like any period of transition, it’s natural to feel some amount of anxiety.

An interesting study by Limeade Institute, [“The New Normal; Facing the Challenges of Returning to Work,”](#) sought to understand how employees were feeling about returning to work. A survey was administered to 4,553 full-time employees, over the age of 18, representing France, Germany, United Kingdom, Australia and the United States. They asked those that were previously working onsite at their place of employment but are now working remotely, about their top sources of anxiety about returning to their previous office/worksites (n = 1628). All employees reported anxiety about returning to work.



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### Top sources of anxiety about returning to the workplace



Source: Limeade.com "The New Normal: Facing the Challenges of Returning to Work"

Most of those worries circle around questions rather than definitive answers at this point. What will work look like in the coming months? When might I need to go back to the office? What expectations will my employer have of me? What flexibility might exist? These are all fair questions to be asking and employees and employers alike are facing the need to create clear expectations about what work will look like as we move forward. One of the key obstacles is the fact that no one really knows the answers to all of these questions right now. If you are feeling uneasy or anxious about what the future holds, know that you're not alone.

Here are a few things to consider to help you navigate this time:

- 1. Imagine Situations You're Afraid Of:** Sometimes imagining a scary situation can help you work through it and plan for it. It'll be easier if you feel like you're prepared and know what to do. So, try planning what you'll do in uncomfortable situations, and that should help control your anxiety.

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2. **Look at the Positives:** It helps to plan ahead to gain a sense of control over the uncertain future, perhaps by revisiting your work wardrobe, dusting off your daily planner, or looking up some new recipes for lunch on the go. You can look for the good in returning to work to boost hope and optimism. Are there coworkers you've missed? Old routines that will be a welcome relief?
3. **Visit Work First:** If you can, try going back to your office before it officially opens up again. Having that exposure of sitting at your desk again could help get rid of some of your anxiety about returning to work. Even if you can't physically enter your office, consider walking around the area near your workplace just to get used to being in that space again.
4. **Find Ways to Stay Safe at Work:** If you're concerned about staying safe at work, then it can be distressing to see coworkers choose not to be vaccinated and then refuse to wear masks or social distancing. Look into your workplace's COVID-19 safety policy to see what kind of accommodations you can expect them to make sure that you feel comfortable and protected while on the job. Being familiar with the policies can help if you need to advocate for yourself to make sure that cleaning practices are being applied as intended. You can also try talking with your coworkers and expressing your boundaries, like not wanting to be too close when speaking, or asking them to use hand sanitizer before using shared equipment. This does not need to be a conflict or an attack, but simply an expression of how to make your workplace a place where everyone can feel comfortable and work effectively.
5. **When Anxiety About Returning to Work Is Something More:** The past year has been an overwhelming time in terms of people's overall well-being and mental health. For some people, anxiety about returning to work after COVID-19 is more than a temporary or situational issue. Instead, it may simply be an expression of an underlying anxiety disorder. If trying strategies to minimize your anxiety doesn't work, that could be a sign that you need more intensive care. Or, if you go back to work and your anxiety doesn't seem to go away, or you become anxious about something else immediately, this could indicate a more persistent issue with anxiety and stress. Seek professional help if you are suffering from persistent anxiety.



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### 6. Other Helpful Tools:

- Be graceful with yourself and others. This is a new and unique situation that everyone is going through in some form together. Despite our best efforts, mistakes will be made. Give yourself space to be patient and understanding with yourself and others.
- Be prepared. Understanding yourself, your needs, and your feelings will help you to be attuned to how you are reacting to the changes that you are going through. Get ahead of things to the extent possible.
- Talk to your coworkers and employer. You're not going through this by yourself and the questions you have are shared by others. Find ways to engage others in dialogue about the realities of the situation, what is known, what is not, and the path forward.
- Breathe. When the anxiety of the unknown begins to swell, sometimes the best first step is simply to stop for a beat and breathe. There are plenty of fantastic resources out there to help guide you in learning how to take a pause, breathe, and re-center yourself.
- Get help. If you are finding that the anxiety associated with these changes is becoming too much to manage you need to be honest with yourself and acknowledge that it may be time to reach out for professional help.

### Tips for Leaders

If you are a leader there are some additional considerations that you are likely contemplating to help your team make a successful transition.

- **Be patient.** Your people are going through a lot at home and work whether they show it or not. People's behavior may change while they process changes and new realities. Be patient with yourself and your team. For many, burnout and return to office anxiety are a result of the lack of family support during the pandemic. For example, many employers have had to help children with virtual lessons or assist elderly parents. With this in mind, employers are encouraged to be as flexible as they can and encourage team members to take advantage of PTO.



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- **Create space for processing and sense-making.** Find ways to create a safe space for people to process their emotions and feelings with each other.
- **Be honest about what you know and what you don't.** As the situation progresses, more facts and data will become available and there could be multiple changes and variables influencing life for you and your team. Be honest with your team about what is known and what isn't. Ask them for their input and questions. The dialogue will help everyone process the situation and feel a sense of control.
- **Overcommunicate.** Don't let open space fill you with anxiety. Make extra time and effort to communicate early and often. It may feel like you're overdoing it but you're not. People want to be a part of the process and feel in the know so look for ways to actively include them in figuring out a path that works for the business and the diverse people on the team.
- **Don't ignore warning signs of distress.** Some of your team (or you) may be having significant challenges navigating the return to work and they may be sending subtle signals that they are in distress. Your attention to your team may be the difference between healthy navigation of stress and a potentially serious situation. Employers can build in extra time for team events and activities that may assist with the transition back into the office environment.

### Latest COVID-19 News

- Testing has been steady around 30,000 diagnostic tests reported per day on average, with the 7-day positive rate below 2% as of Monday 6/14, the lowest in several months. Hospitalizations have declined over the last several weeks.
- The state's 7-day moving average for daily cases was 244 on Monday -- the lowest since June 2020. The 7-day death average was 22 on Monday. The state's fatality rate is 2.2%.

## ASK THE DOC

**COVID-19 and Mental Health****COVID-19 DASHBOARD  
As of June 14, 2021****Michigan Confirmed Cases**  
892,469**Michigan COVID-19 Deaths**  
19,548**Wayne County Cases**  
(excluding Detroit): 101,612**Wayne County Deaths**  
(excluding Detroit): 2,548**Detroit City Cases:** 51,282**Detroit City Deaths:** 2,264

- In terms of vaccinations, Detroit is still trying to catch up with other areas in metro Detroit. As of Friday, it only had a 36% vaccination rate, compared to 55% statewide. The rate is significantly lower than that of Oakland County, which has 65.4% of people vaccinated, Wayne County at 61.8% and Macomb County at 54.4%. A new door-to-door vaccination effort is targeting those who are homebound due to illness or physical limitations. The new program is the latest in the city's ongoing efforts to reach its most vulnerable populations by visiting homeless shelters, senior buildings and other assisted living facilities, as well as providing access for disabled residents and those without their own transportation and doing door-to-door outreach and education.
- Anti-Vaccine Activists use the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System, or VAERS, a federal database, to spread fear about COVID-19 Vaccines. The database includes hundreds of thousands of reports of health events that occurred minutes, hours or days after vaccination. Many of the reported events are coincidental — things that happen by chance, not caused by the shot. But when millions of people are vaccinated within a short period, the total number of these reported events can look big. VAERS has played a major role in the spread of misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines. The data is regularly appropriated by anti-vaccine advocates, who use the reports to claim falsely that COVID-19 vaccines are dangerous. They are aided by the fact that the entire VAERS database is public — it can be downloaded by anyone for any purpose.

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## COVID-19 and Mental Health

- The new Michigan Department of Health and Human Services order went into effect Tuesday, June 1, and ends at 11:59 p.m. on July 1. Starting July 1, all remaining MDHHS restrictions will be lifted, including the mask mandate and capacity limits.



### Beginning June 1:



- There will no longer be capacity limits outdoors.
- There will no longer be capacity limits at residential gatherings.
- Indoor establishments will be at 50% capacity.
- Social gatherings will now be regulated only by the venue.
  - *For example, guidelines or rules for an indoor wedding or conference would be set by the establishment in which it is hosted.*
- Face masks continue to be required for non-vaccinated individuals indoors.



**Beginning July 1**, all broad epidemic orders will be lifted.



- Everyone 12 years of age and older is now recommended to get a COVID-19 vaccination. Get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as you can. Widespread vaccination is a critical tool to help stop the pandemic. Please visit [www.Michigan.gov/COVIDvaccine](http://www.Michigan.gov/COVIDvaccine) for the latest information about vaccination. You can find vaccination site near you by using: <https://vaccinefinder.org/search>

**[Click Here to Find a Vaccination Site Near You](#)**



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### Mental Health Resources

- Behavioral health – which includes mental health, substance use, and more – is a key part of your overall well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic has left many people feeling anxious or depressed. The [DWIHN website offers a free and anonymous assessment](#) to help you determine if you or someone you care about should connect with a behavioral health professional. There are 13 screenings available, including for PTSD, substance abuse disorders, depression, anxiety and a general well-being assessment. Immediately following the brief questionnaire you will see your results, recommendations, and key resources.
  - Another excellent digital tool to support mental health is [myStrength](#), an app with web and mobile tools designed to support your goals and wellbeing. myStrength's highly interactive, individually-tailored resources allow users to address depression, anxiety, stress, substance use, chronic pain and sleep challenges, while also supporting the physical and spiritual aspects of whole-person health. Visit the [DWIHN website](#) to learn more.
  - DWIHN offers a Veteran's Navigator to support those who have served our country. Veterans can receive assistance with mental health concerns, employment and housing, transportation, benefits and a variety of other services. The Veteran Navigator provides support to the following individuals:
    - All veterans regardless of discharge status.
    - Those who do not meet service eligibility due to time-in-service or who are not eligible for Veterans Administration (VA) services
    - Veterans who do not wish to seek traditional support paths
- To contact Chris Brown, the DWIHN Veteran's Navigator, call 313-585-0061 or email [cbrown@dwihn.org](mailto:cbrown@dwihn.org).
- Additionally, if you're feeling emotionally distressed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, get free, confidential support from a Michigan Stay Well counselor. Dial 1-888-535-6136 and press "8". The Stay Well counseling line is available 24/7. [www.Michigan.gov/StayWell](http://www.Michigan.gov/StayWell)





## Upcoming Webinars

- **Uplifting our Children and Families - Tuesday, June 22 at 12:00 p.m.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed life dramatically for many families. As a parent or caregiver, how can you help your children cope while maintaining your own mental wellness? Attend our free, one-hour webinar on how to recognize and manage symptoms of emotional distress in yourself and your kids.

[https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_1UTFMbC9RHKnAHjcxN3FZw](https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_1UTFMbC9RHKnAHjcxN3FZw)

- **Managing the Anxiety of Returning to On-Site Work- Thursday, June 24, 2021, at 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm or Friday, June 25, 2021, 9:00 -10:00 am**

Employees that have worked remotely throughout the pandemic may experience anxiety (to varying degrees) during the return to on-site/in-person work. This webinar presentation will focus on understanding and effectively managing anxiety relating to the return to the workplace during the waning of the pandemic. The program is suitable for non-supervising and supervising employees.

Register: [https://cornell.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_IMffW-6IT2uFmVXfyF3J0w](https://cornell.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_IMffW-6IT2uFmVXfyF3J0w)