



Returning to the Workplace

Webinar Transcript

Operator: Greetings and welcome to the RBC Investor & Treasury Services: "Returning to the Workplace" webinar. During the presentation, all participants will be in a listen-only mode. If at any time during the conference you need to reach an operator, please press the Star, 0. As a reminder, this conference is being recorded Wednesday, May 27, 2020. I would now like to turn the conference over to David Cyr. Please go ahead.

David Cyr: Thank you very much operator. Good morning to all of you who have joined us. Thank you very much for joining the RBC Investor & Treasury Services Webinar on Returning to the Workplace during COVID-19.

As the operator mentioned, my name is David. I'm the Global Head of Client Operations at RBC for Investor & Treasury Services. In this role, I lead approximately 3500 employees in 16 locations globally. And I share the leadership of our Crisis Management Team with our Chief Risk Officer, Malena Ljungkvist.

We are pleased you could attend our webinar today. It's clearly an important topic and one that we are all working very hard on. RBC implemented our BCP plans in Q1 and Q2 of 2020 in response to the COVID outbreak. And this has enabled 99% of our employees to work from home worldwide.

The process of bringing these employees back to the workplace requires careful consideration and a number of key factors. And for this reason, we are taking a very measured approach to ensure we proceed at the right pace and that we keep the health and well-being of our employees as our number one priority.

We've defined nine guiding principles across the company, which are consistent across the enterprise. And we've a phased-in plan of three phases. The timing of these phases has not yet been determined in terms of the start date and the reason for that is because we are

waiting on specific government and medical jurisdictional advice in all of our jurisdictions across the world.

The crisis management team is supported by our HR, our partners in HR, risk, technology and real estate. Like many of you, we continue to gather information from a variety of sources as we further define our plans. With this intention in mind, we've invited a Toronto law firm Borden Ladner Gervais LLP, to share their perspective on some of the legal and practical issues faced by employers in returning to the workplace.

I should mention that we'll have an opportunity for you to ask questions via the WebEx chat option at any point throughout the discussion. Simply click on the chat icon located on the bottom right hand or the bottom of your screen to open the chat box and type in your question. We'll respond to those questions at the end of this presentation.

The slides - right now the slide is showing you where to click on in order to access that link. I'd now like to welcome Dan Palayew, who is a partner in Labour and Employment Law at BLG, who'll be introducing his colleagues and moderating their presentation. Dan, over to you.

Dan Palayew: Thank you very much David and good morning everybody. Thank you for joining us. We certainly recognize and appreciate that this is a very difficult time for all, especially now that across the country we are slowly but surely beginning to emerge from over two months of lockdown.

David mentioned our goal this morning is to provide you with the legal and practical insights to assist you in developing a path forward for your organization and to ensuring a safe and efficient return to work for your employees, your customers, visitors, and really the public as a whole.

In the next 45 minutes that we have together, we'll be focusing on what we have seen collectively as the three principal emerging issues for employers. Firstly, we'll be dealing with testing and screening methods, then preparing the workplace for reopening, and then recalling employees and dealing with refusals to work. And then we'll have 15 minutes at the end to answer any questions that you have.

So, please feel free to use that chat to send in your questions and we'll do our best in our remaining time at the end to get as many of those answered as possible.

So, our first speaker, we're going to be moving from left to right across the country. Our first speaker is my partner Shelley-Mae Mitchell, who's in our Labour Employment Group in our Vancouver office. Good morning Shelley-Mae.

Shelley-Mae Mitchell: Good morning. Good morning, everybody.

Dan Palayew: So, Shelley-Mae we are truly entering a new frontier of science and medical issues in the workplace. Can you please help us to identify and understand some of the screening methods that organizations are going to be looking at? And also, help us understand what some of the legal and practical issues involved with them are.

Shelley-Mae Mitchell: Sure, of course, I'd be happy to. So, first of all, as employers struggle to open up and operate safely, one issue that we constantly hear about and constantly have questions about is, how or if employers can screen employees or in fact even customers to ensure that when they attend at their premises, they are safe and healthy.

So, the issue of screening is somewhat controversial. And there's various forms of screening and testing. And so, without getting into all the technical details of screening and testing, I'll just say that the most common form of screening employees at this point and the type that is the most acceptable is the passive form of screening.

And that is where an employer posts signs and they require employees to self-identify. For example, if they have a fever, a cough, a temperature or something like that. So, they are asked to then notify someone in employment, usually HR, if they are having any of those symptoms. And that's the form of passive screening.

More active forms of screening would include requiring an employee to fill out a form or take their own temperature and confirm that they aren't at a certain level before they attend at work. So, those are common forms of testing and we are also seeing a lot of questions with respect to temperature testing.

In Canada, and particularly in the West in BC, they have not encouraged temperature testing as significantly as the view here by our health authorities is that temperature testing is not necessarily indicative of someone who already has COVID, as temperature rising often occurs after or partway through when they have COVID.

And indeed, the other issue is, sometimes people will have the COVID and they won't even necessarily have a temperature at all. So that becomes a little bit difficult.

One of the issues that becomes, something that the employer has to consider when they are looking at the different types of screenings is, is it reasonable in the circumstances.

And so, what is clear is that, in determining whether it's reasonable and different forms of screening are reasonable. The importance of balancing the level of the interference in privacy of the employee with the reasonableness or the type of screening and in particular, the industry as well.

So, what's clear is that it's reasonable for all employers to require employees to report symptoms of illness that may be related to COVID. So, that is reasonable regardless of the industry.

And again, as I identified, passive testing or screening where you are asking an employee to self-identify or self-report is also been considered reasonable.

The issue about whether employers could actually test, i.e., implement forms of testing, is not clear at this very moment, Canada doesn't have an approved form of portable testing that could be implemented in the workplace. So, we are not seeing that happen.

Again, looking at the reasonableness of the testing, you won't have to look at the industry. In certain industries such as healthcare, food services, other types of essential services, they've been more active in requiring active forms of screening and testing. But in more office place industries, we are not really seeing the forms of temperature testing, for example, taking place.

Now, another problem with the screening and taking information is the issue of privacy, and what exactly an employer does with the information. So, for example, if an employer decided to implement temperature testing and employee's temperature is tested as they arrived at the workplace, the issue becomes what is done with that information? How is it stored? How is it collected? You know, who knows about this information?

And so, the privacy issues become very important issues for employers to address as well. And that's something that the employer has to make decisions on. One last little comment on, you know, the problems and the issues with screening as human rights issues.

And so, for example, one of the things that employers have to be careful about is not, for example, testing only certain types of people or screening only certain types of people that would otherwise be protected under the Human Rights Code.

And the other issue, of course, an employer has to be careful about is there may be other issues or health issues that are not related to COVID. That would have to be accommodated and addressed in these types of screening or testing.

So, that's just my seven minutes quick overview, Dan, of some of what's happening as far as testing, and some of the pitfalls and the difficulties that an employer has to address if they are going to implement certain types of screening and testing.

Dan Palayew: Thanks Shelley-Mae. We are truly in uncharted territory here. But thanks, we see a lot of good practical steps. And on that note, are there any other steps that employers can be taking right now to get ready for the screening methods and implementations in returning to the workplace?

Shelley-Mae Mitchell: Absolutely. I think one of the most important things that an employer should be doing as they return people to work is they need to determine what exactly they are going to do with respect to screening. And they need to most importantly develop a policy or a protocol that would be circulated to employees in advance so that employees know what to expect when they arrive or well in advance of when they arrive at the workplace.

So, for example, if you are going to require when the employee returns to work on a daily basis that they check the temperature at home or fill out a questionnaire. That would have to be identified in a protocol or a policy, so that an employee understands in advance what will be required of them.

Including – and included in your protocol would also be that, you know, the employees, if they have any questions or concerns in advance that they should let HR know. Because one of the things you are looking for is you are looking for employee consent.

And getting - providing in the form of a document particularly if you are doing passive screaming, i.e., you are telling the employees to self-report. Then that's, there's an argument, there's implied consent if you are providing the policy in advance for their review.

And don't forget, included in the policy that you develop for returning to work and your screening or your testing, you would also need to let employees know who is dealing with the information and specifically address the privacy aspects of any information that you are collecting as the employer, that is very important.

And in addition, the last thing you want to address in advance is to determine what will happen if an employee refuses or what the outcome will be in those particular cases.

And last little tip, I would say is making sure that you are being consistent in how you deal with refusals and how you approach it. So normally, a good policy on testing and screening will address that in advance in the policy. So, those are my quick tips in the quick time that I have, Dan.

Dan Palayew: Thanks Shelley-Mae, very helpful.

Our next speaker is Duncan Marsden. He's a Partner again in our Labour and Employment Group in our Calgary office. Good morning. It's early morning to you, Duncan.

So, Duncan, we want to continue and really focus on the practical side of these issues for our attendees. So, let's continue on that theme please, what are some of the important first practical steps that employers should be taking now to help ensure a smooth reopening of the workplace?

Duncan Marsden: And now obviously, the answer to these questions is going to be very fact-specific and will depend in a large part on your employees and the type of workplace you are dealing with.

For example, a restaurant may be very different from an office block. And customer-facing waiting staff in a restaurant or retail store and employees in a shop are going to have very different considerations than, for example, members of an accounts department in an office environment.

As well, we have to remember that there are external threats, if you want to put it that way to the work environment. So, members of the mailroom will be receiving parcels which could potentially need disinfecting and will also have visitors to the workplace. And so, there needs to be consideration as to what's going to happen with those.

So, there's no real one-size-fits-all to this, unfortunately, Dan. But there are a number of steps that we can follow, we do recommend that you follow and which should apply to all workplaces.

So, the first thing we recommend is that you carry out a risk assessment. So, as an employer, you should assess your workplace for risks and make sure that it's safe for employees to return to work. And this may actually be a requirement under applicable provincial health and safety legislation.

And as part of this risk assessment, employers should categorize the COVID-19 exposure risk level of the various employee roles at the worksite. And then take appropriate steps to protect those employee roles based on the exposure risk level.

As part of that process, you may need to consider if you have any specific employees who are particularly at risk. For example, employees who are over 60 or employees who have compromised immune system and consider whether specific adjustments need to be made for them.

And as part of that process, again, you may need to ask your employees to disclose if they think they are at a heightened risk. And if they do think that, what measures they believe could minimize the risk for them.

The risk assessment will also need to include an assessment of external risks being brought into the work environment, which I've already touched on. And my next slide is going to deal with some examples as to what can be done with that - in that regard.

But the thing to remember when carrying out a risk assessment is that you have to take as an employer all reasonable measures to eliminate risks. But you are not required to guarantee that every employee will not catch anything in the workplace, because obviously, Dan, such a guarantee would be impossible.

So, once you carried out your risk assessment, the next thing you need to do is create a return-to-work plan. And this will include practical steps for what is required to return to the workplace. And you may want to create a task force to consider what is included in the plan. So, you get a diverse set of views from across the workplace.

I think where you would start when you are creating this type of plan is the first thing you want to consider is what do we want the new workplace to look like. So there's going to be assessment of business needs against preventative measures.

And as part of this, you are going to consider what the layout of the office is going to look like. So, are you going to go with 50% capacity on each floor? Are you going to alternate floors? How many people are going to work from home? Presumably, you'll be closing work canteens or communal areas such as lunchrooms, those sorts of considerations as to what the workplace will look like.

And then the second consideration, I think, when you are beginning to create your return-to-work plan is are you going to return to work and do everything that you did before? So, are you going to do the same product? Are you going to do the same function? Is everything going to be the same or will there be changes based on the new normal?

So, when you have those two issues, there are certain questions that follow on from that?

So, the obvious one is, do we need everyone at work right away, like, physically at work?

And if not, how are you going to choose who is going to be recalled and who is going to remain on layoff or remain working from home?

And remember, Human Rights Legislation will apply to those decisions. You have to make sure that they are not unlawfully discriminatory either in fact or based on perception.

So, you need to consider whether or not some or all of the employees are going to work from home, you need to consider issues such as working time, what are they going to look like? Can we stagger the start time to assist in social distancing both in the office and on public transport? And do we need any specific training on the return-to-work issue. The workplace is going to look very different and do we need any training in that regard?

Do we need to amend any policies to take account with the new work environment? And the ones which immediately spring to mind are an amendment to the travel policy for example and an amendment to your working from home policy because I very much doubt that either of those deal with COVID-19 situations.

And then finally, the two things to look at which Stephanie is going to touch on in more detail is, what is the communication to the employees going to look like both to those coming back and those who are not yet coming back? And what are the procedures for recalling employees, Stephanie will speak about those in a minute.

Then when you've done your risk assessment and you've created your return-to-work plan, you need a policy in place to make sure that employees follow the requirements of returning to the workplace. And again, this will be on a case-by-case basis.

But with respect to any such policy, Dan, my suggestion is that clarity is key. So, you may have to get as granular as if you have a runny nose, you have to do the following. And it might be that you have to tell your manager or you have to stay at home. But certainly, you are going to have to deal with specific situations. And it should be clear to the employees what they have to do in each of those situations.

And the policy also needs to deal with any abuse of the system. And presumably there's going to be zero tolerance for a failure to comply with this policy. Because if you do fail to comply, then you are potentially putting your employees lives at risk and it really is that serious.

You are going to have to have protocols for dealing with confirmed COVID-19 cases or employees displaying symptoms or returning from abroad or post-infection. So, those are things that you'll need to consider. Usually, they will require quarantine for a period of 14 days.

You are also going to need to consider training employees and managers as to what is required. For example, if employees are required to disinfect certain machinery at certain periods of time or disinfect certain areas, or use certain protective equipment, then training needs to be provided so that managers are aware and they can pass that information on to the employees.

And then finally, your communication to employees, it needs to include a reference for employees to be told what the company has done so far to make their return as safe as possible including any measures relating to hiring outside cleaning services, what changes have been made, and what we expect them to do when they return to the workplace.

Dan Palayew: Thanks Duncan. Now, we've all been living for over two months with distancing, hand sanitizing, face masks and that's just to go do our groceries. Now that we are talking about return to work, what specific hygiene measures should employers be looking at implementing to prepare for a safe return to work?

Duncan Marsden: Yes, thanks. So, the obvious thing, and the number one bullet point is to follow health authority's recommendations and they change regularly, and they change throughout the country. So, the first thing to do is absolutely make sure that you are following health authority recommendation.

But then beyond that, I think in the workplace, you need to consider what you are trying to achieve in the manner in which you are going to do that. So, the obvious one is physical distancing. Some people call it social distancing. But I think it really is keeping people apart.

And so, how you are going to enhance physical distancing. And we've already touched on a few points, such as considering flexible work hours, considering maybe having a Team A and a Team B, and Team A work for a week and then Team B work for next week. And the team that isn't in the office works from home during that particular week.

There will also be a need to sort of physically spread out employees in the office. And the question is how are you going to do that? And that may be very easy in some industries. For example, in a law firm, Dan, where we all have our own office, I could very easily, you know, leave the elevator, take the 10 steps to my office, close the door and then I am physically

distant from everyone for the entire day. But that might not be possible in a work environment, which is more cubicle-based, for example.

We are going to need to move away from handshakes and embracing and all these sorts of things need to be considered and explained to employees. And we may need to be introducing physical barriers such as shields or walls or require the use of personal protective equipment.

And it really even comes down to the granular level. Is the wearing of a mask going to be mandatory in the workplace? And how do employees find out about that? How do they know?

And remember, this doesn't just apply to employees. Any visitors to your workplace, if they sat in reception, you know, we may well be requiring them to wear personal protective equipment as well. So, these are all measures that need to be taken with respect to physical distancing.

Beyond that, I think it's the general and obvious issue surrounding, supporting respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene. So, providing hand sanitizer, for example, and adequate washing facilities, posting signs, reminding people as to how to wash their hands, to remind them to wash their hands regularly, to cough into their elbows. The things that we have been talking about for the last few months in particular.

Presumably, there's also going to be a complete ban on travel unless absolutely necessary. And again, I guess, one of the more important things is to issue guidance or requirement as to what the symptoms are and what employees have to do. Should they have any concerns with respect to whether or not they are displaying symptoms?

But other than that, Dan, I think everything else is on the slide. And I don't have any further comments on those issues.

Dan Palayew: Great, thanks, Duncan. We'll now move to our Toronto Partner Stephanie Young, who practises out of our Toronto office. Good morning, Stephanie.

Stephanie Young: Good morning, Dan. Good morning, everyone.

Dan Palayew: So, Stephanie, literally millions of Canadians are waiting anxiously to return to work and employers want to get them back to work. But once again, we are facing a lot of novel issues. How should employers recall all of their employees? How do they go about recalling these employees to work into the workplace?

Stephanie Young: It's a good question, Dan. And there's an easier answer when we're talking about unionized employees because they have clear - they have a clear process in their collective agreement.

Whereas when we're talking about non-unionized employees, there is no prescribed recall process. So, employers who are recalling non-union employees from a layoff or bringing them back into the workplace for the first time following a work-from-home period are going to have to have a clear plan for who to recall and when.

And Duncan spoke about having this return-to-work plan earlier, it's very important that any return-to-work plan have objective criteria for selecting employees. In most cases, this is going to firstly be based on an identification of business and staffing needs.

And from there, we've seen employers taking different approaches to bring people back to work. For example, I've heard of some employers recalling full-time employees only at first. Others are recalling based on employee seniority or others are recalling employees in certain positions or who have the training and experience to perform a greater variety of tasks than others.

In terms of when employees are recalled, employers are going to have to think about whether employees come back in ways whether their days at work are staggered or whether their hours of work and their schedules are different from what they normally are.

As Duncan said, there's no one-size-fits-all approach but having a clear plan with your objective criteria is going to be key. This will remove any unconscious bias from the selection process.

And it's going to help defend against any claims or complaints that employees might make about why others were selected to come back first over them. And this is going to include any human rights-related allegations.

It's recommended that the plan or the criteria be in written form and that any supporting documentation relating to the selection of particular employees be retained. Again, this is going to help defend against any complaints about the process.

Once an employer has decided who is going to be recalled, those employees should receive a recall notice. I think that takes us to our next slide.

Dan Palayew: Okay, great. So, you mentioned recall notices, it sounds like letters are going to have to be drafted. What should be included in those recall notices or letters?

Stephanie Young: You're exactly right. It's strongly recommended that a letter be provided that the notice be in written form so that everyone is clear about what's happening and when it's happening.

So, the notice should set out the terms of the employees' return. This is going to include when they should actually come back to work, what time and where. And if there's anyone that they should report to specifically that should be included.

We should also be including their hours of work and their pay if it's going to be different than normal. And we know in some cases with some clients, that's going to be the case. We're going to be talking about how to respond to employee refusals to return in a minute.

But while we're on the question of the communication, I think it's important to note that the recall notice should advise employees of the potential consequences for a failure or refusal to return and who they can contact if they're not able to return for any reason or if they have questions.

And further, we know that recalls to work might impact employee eligibility for the Canada emergency response benefit or employment insurance, depending on how much income they're going to be earning when they come back.

So, this is something that we're going to want to flag for employees so that they're aware of this issue and can prepare for it. Finally, employers are taking a number of steps to ready their workplaces for employees to return.

And as both Shelley-Mae and Duncan were speaking about, we know employers are implementing new policies and practices for what the workplace is going to look like and what employees might have to do before they come back.

So, employers should be sure that they're clearly communicating to employees what health and safety measures have been taken prior to the employees returning. And they're going to want to make sure that this is delivered with the notice of recall.

This will ensure employees have sufficient notice to comply with any such new policies. And it's going to help alleviate some of the stress and anxiety that employees are inevitably going to experience about coming back to work.

It's also going to establish a paper record that, again, the employer can rely on to support the workplaces in the face of any work refusal asserted by one or more of the employees.

Dan Palayew: Thanks, Stephanie. I had said at the outset that employees are anxious to return to work, but I just want to pick up on something you just said, which I think we've all been seeing in the past couple of weeks, especially, which is some employees are also anxious about returning to work.

And then we can also, I think, anticipate that some employees once they have returned to work will then perhaps be anxious about remaining in the workplace. So, what can you tell us? What can employers be thinking about now in anticipation of these challenges?

Stephanie Young: Thanks Dan. I would say that the most common question I've been asked is, how do we deal with work refusals and what's the legitimate work refusal and what's not?

And we've been hearing a variety of reasons from employees that form the basis for their refusal to return to work following a recall notice. And these have included anything from obligations to care for a family member such as a child, who can't go to daycare right now, the employee's own illness, exposure to someone who's COVID-19 positive or has symptoms.

Some employees have been directed by public health or their doctor to remain in isolation or quarantine. And what we've been hearing most often is what you picked up on that the employees have general feelings that the workplace is not safe, and they don't want to return to work and aren't comfortable for this reason.

Any work refusal that an employer has received will have to be considered on a case-by-case basis. And employers actually need to understand the reason for the refusal in each case in order to determine if it's justified.

So, the first step when you're faced with a refusal is to gather more information about why the employee is saying they can't come back to work. So, any employer should actually ask that question, why can't you come back to work right now?

From there, the employer will need to assess whether the basis for the refusal falls into any protected category. For instance, across the country, we now have protected leaves of absence under our employment standards legislation that are available to employees who are not able to work because of the COVID-19 pandemic impact.

Outside of statutory leave, employers have a duty to accommodate employees who aren't able to work for reasons related to child care or elder care responsibilities or who can't return to work because of a disability.

So, employers need to be very careful not to impose adverse consequences on employees in these types of cases. And where the duty to accommodate has arisen, they're going to have an obligation to actually explore all possible accommodation solutions.

For employees who can't actually return to the physical space because schools and daycares remain closed, this might mean looking at different work-from-home arrangements perhaps including new or different flexible hours. Or in some cases, it might mean actually transitioning an employee who's been on a layoff to a leave of absence, if they can't return to work and aren't able to work remotely.

When we're talking about an employee who's experiencing the normal stress or feelings that return to work might be unsafe simply because the country continues to be in a pandemic situation, it's generally not that individual employee's choice to simply refuse to return when the employer has recalled them.

And this is particularly going to be the case where the employer has put appropriate health and safety measures in place at work. In circumstances where employees are refusing because they feel the workplace is unsafe, those employees have the option of choosing to follow a statutory work refusal process applicable in their province.

And in most cases, this is actually going to include an attempt to resolve the issue with the employer first before the employee escalates their concern to their Ministry of Labour or regulatory equivalent.

When an employee does raise a health and safety concern, any employer should review it, consider it, respond to the employee and then take any necessary steps to promptly address that concern and rectify any issues that actually present a legitimate health and safety risks that the employee has identified.

If an employer is satisfied in the end that it's taken all reasonable steps to protect the employees. And as an employee is continuing to refuse to return to work without a legitimate basis for doing so then in that case, the employer may be justified in taking disciplinary measures or deeming the employee to have resigned or abandon their employment depending on the circumstances. So, again, those kinds of decisions have to be made on a case-by-case basis considering the circumstances.

And one point of caution I'll raise is, we need to be careful about exposure to reprisal allegations. Reprisal is prohibited across the country. So, employers need to make sure that they're doing their due diligence in response to employee safety concerns, and that they're

not imposing adverse consequences on employees simply because they have raised the health and safety issue or initiated a work refusal process.

And, Dan, all of this is going to apply equally to work refusals that are communicated before the employee comes back to work for the first time following a layoff or work-from-home arrangements or work refusals where the employee has already been back. And since they've been back, they've identified a concern.

Dan Palayew: Great, thanks Stephanie. So that wraps up the official PowerPoint part of the presentation. But we have received a number of questions. So, thank you for those.

And I'll now turn it back over to David to repeat and answer or at least assign to either RBC or the BLG panelists on the call to answer your questions.

David Cyr: Okay, thanks, Dan. And thanks to your team, very informative, great information.

Folks on the phone, we'll now move to Q&A, I'll remind you that there's a slide on the webinar showing you how you can send us questions in real time and we're happy to respond to those.

We have a number that we have received already and we're happy to address those. I'll take one for RBC, and then I'm going to refer a number of them to Dan and his team. But if you have questions in real time now, please submit them via the chat window.

One of the questions we have is how, what feedback is RBC receiving from its employees? Are they anxious to return to the workplace? This is a very interesting dynamic across the world.

We have literally a split down the middle, a 50-50 split almost exactly in our pulse surveys, which come out monthly, our all-hands call sessions, which are now on a bi-weekly basis.

And Dave McKay himself is doing employee calls and the sentiment from those calls as well is about 50% want to return and about 50% are really enjoying the work-at-home environment. There're two issues that we're dealing with.

There are those employees who are most vulnerable. And you've heard some of the comments from Dan and his team today about that, either childcare responsibilities, so, with schools or daycares being shut down, how do we accommodate those and RBC's response to those. Or where employees are taking care of elder at-risk parents.

And that in particular is quite common across our employee group and we have had a response to that. So I would say, yes, there are people that are both anxious to return and there are people that are anxious to stay in their current environment, depending on whether they enjoy it or whether they fall into one of the high-risk categories.

Okay. So, I hope you enjoyed that. There's a question that just came in from Angela. Do you want to go ahead and answer that one, please?

Stephanie Young: Yes, sure. It's Stephanie.

David Cyr: Stephanie, thank you. Yes, thank you.

Stephanie Young: No problem. It's Stephanie here. I'm happy to answer Angela's question. Angela's question is, if an employee has an auto-immune disease, can he refuse to return to work given he provides that recommendation from his doctor?

So, this is an employee auto-immune disease, and the doctor is saying we don't recommend that this individual return to work right now. Now, based on the public health guidance that is out there, we know that individuals with auto-immune diseases are in the highly vulnerable group.

So, this would be a legitimate reason for an employee to say, "I can't come back to work right now." And you're absolutely right, Angela, you're going to want to confirm, so you're going to want to have a note from the employee's doctor confirming that there is an auto-immune disease and that the doctor recommends the individual doesn't come back to work at this time.

Now, you are going to want to look at are there other ways that we can accommodate this person so that they can perform their work and receive income in the normal course of their employment?

So, if there are options for having this individual perform some tasks from home or if they have the full ability to work remotely, then that shouldn't be an issue and they should just be given the option to work from home.

David Cyr: Great. Thanks very much, Stephanie. Let's take the next question up. And this is a very difficult question. In fact, I'll provide some of the RBC's response. But Dan I'll also ask if you or your team have seen this one and it's regarding public transit.

So, Ron, thank you for your question, how to handle concerns not so much for the workplace setting but refusal to take public transportation to get to the workplace. At the enterprise crisis management team of RBC, we've debated this issue at length.

And we're coming down to a point of view that obviously is based on our principles of safety for our employees, from home to the office, including in the office. So, our guidance to them in terms of avoiding public transit, if there are not measures put in place by a particular municipality.

So in Toronto for example, I know there's some testing going on with UV lights and some distancing measures on public transit. But, you know, the results of those are not yet out so it is extremely difficult.

From our employee group and our pulse surveys, one of the pieces that has come up pretty consistently is that employees will revert to cars, which, you know, frankly, none of us think that's a great solution and are requesting assistance for things like parking in large centers.

Dan, you or your team, have you heard this question and how are you advising clients?

Duncan Marsden: It sounds like Dan is on mute, shall I jump in there? You want me to jump...

David Cyr: Absolutely. That'd be great. Yes, please do.

Duncan Marsden: Not a problem. So, and Stephanie, feel free to jump in if you have any comments in addition to what I'm about to say. But I think the difficulty that you have with all of these issues is that this is a brand new and unprecedented situation and we just don't know how to handle it.

And I don't think there's any right or wrong with how people are feeling. So, you may feel that it is great and justified that people are not taking public transport or you may think that is ridiculous and that, you know, people of course, people should be taking public transport, what's the big deal.

But I think the main consideration is that you have to take account of these employees' fears and anxieties and they could genuinely be justified and legitimate anxieties.

And it comes back to a point I made earlier which is, a lot of people may have been in their houses for weeks, literally too scared to exit. And now we're requiring them to come back to the workplace. And so, there can be genuine considerations which apply to that.

At the risk of repeating Stephanie too much, I think you have to look at each situation individually and make an assessment based on that situation.

So, if someone is too scared to use public transport at the moment and doesn't want to come in for risk of catching something on public transport, then you need to look at alternatives. Can they work from home for a period of time, for a longer period of time or is it necessary for them to come into the office?

If it is necessary for them to come into the office, you know, can they as you say take private transport? Can you require them to take a taxi although I'm not sure how much better that is?

But other than suggesting that they socially distance while they're on the public transport and wear protective equipment while they're on it, I'm not sure there is a good answer to that other than allowing the employee to work from home if at all possible.

Stephanie Young: And I'll just add one thing to that as well. And similar to what you've said with respect to RBC, many of our clients are struggling with that issue. And as Duncan identified, there's various alternatives.

One other alternative that employers are looking at is staggering work hours, so that they're not travelling on public transit during the peak times when it would be difficult to social distance.

So, we're seeing a lot of clients starting to schedule staggered work hours or shorter work hours for periods of time as people get used to the return. So, that's another practical tip that some people are looking at as well.

David Cyr: Great. Thanks, Stephanie. Thanks, Duncan. Duncan, there's a question regarding PPE in the office in particular in common areas, kitchens, hallways, meeting rooms. There is an RBC point of view but I'd like yours first and then happy to chip in.

Duncan Marsden: Yes, absolutely. And so in terms of wearing PPE, and again, I think this will form part of your return-to-work policy, I think the recommendation is to ensure that there is physical distancing in all common areas.

And if it's not possible to physically distance, then I think you are going to be requiring people to wear PPE, whether that'd be a facemask or whether that'd be gloves or whether that'd be requiring people to sanitize or wash their hands prior to entering a common area.

And then again, when they leave, these are all things which need to take place. But certainly, wearing PPE when in a common area is something that I think a lot of our clients are going to be considering and are going to be requiring when there's a return to the workplace simply as a means of ensuring physical distancing when it might not actually be possible to maintain six feet or two metres depending on your point of view.

David Cyr: Right, right. From an RBC perspective, in high-risk areas, we will provide PPE, we will provide sanitization or sanitizing stations but we won't necessarily require it. Within our policy, what we said is, we'll provide it and it's the employee's choice.

However, to your good point Duncan, in the event you're in a space where it's physically impossible to maintain the six feet or the two metres for distancing, it will be a requirement. So, potentially small meeting rooms, etcetera.

Duncan Marsden: Yes, and I think it all comes down to the issue of, you know, you as an employer are required to maintain a safe workplace as far as it's possible. And so I think, if you want to require employees to wear PPE in common areas, that's something that you're entitled to do as part of that process.

David Cyr: Right. Duncan, next question, what was the decision process and planning on coming back in two groups A and B? I think you talked about rotating, when it is generally recommended a 14-day isolation period. Any thoughts on three groups which have one or two weeks on off allowing for 14 days?

Duncan Marsden: Oh yes, I mean, I've heard of various iterations. I think the idea between the sort of one week on and one week off was that, you know, it's been a 14-day cycle. And the hope would be that symptoms would display within the week off and then you could isolate as necessary within the 14 days.

But I think that's a great idea to have three groups, if possible. And then, you know, you have two groups working from home or one group in the office in a particular period of time. I think, as with all these things, it's going to be a gradual return to the workplace.

And so, it's a balance between, you know, how gradual can you tolerate. I mean, we've all been working from home for a significant period of time and is it possible for you to bring back 30% of the workforce at any particular time?

And if it is, I think that's a great idea because not only will it assist in what we're talking about, but it will also assist in the ability to physically distance people. If there are fewer people in the office, it's easier to physically distance obviously.

David Cyr: Yes, for sure, for sure. Question on how RBC is keeping its employees engaged and sharing information with them and, you know, I think these, really these questions go to just good general management practices. We're engaging our employees on a number of levels.

If you're an employee and you went to our internal intranet site today, you would see there's a technology Q&A about how to work from home. And we've had our Chief Medical Officer of Health weigh in with things like good posture when sitting at a desk or using a headset and things like that, simple things that people wouldn't have necessarily thought of having never worked at home before.

We also have another section there that is around how employees should look at the policies relative to working at home. So, provisioning equipment, hours of work, what do I do if I have to provide childcare, etcetera?

In terms of how we're specifically engaging them, it's as simple as managers are conducting daily check-ins with their employees, so small teams of employees filtered right up to the entire 80,000 with Dave McKay on a regular basis, have a stand up or a check-in with their employees.

Where all employees, are on a video conference in that team talking about production for that day, talking about client issues for that day, and talking about their issues relative to how they're feeling about working at home.

The second is we're doing a formal pulse survey on a monthly basis. That comes out and confidentially asks employees for their feedback in many different areas relative to their current experience, and whether they're getting information and support, et cetera.

And then the last piece is on a bi-weekly basis at an executive level, each of us around the world is doing all-hands calls that are supported with a very similar Q&A to what you're experiencing today.

And those, the participation in those has been, you know, roughly 80% of our employees on a regular basis joining in on those. And we generally run out of time in terms of the questions. So, there's a number of areas where we're focusing on engaging our employees. And Dan, you and your team, I'm sure advising others have seen or heard others.

Remember, if you do have a question, click on the chat icon. There are no questions outstanding right now. So, we'll give it a minute or two. And then, if there are no further questions, we'll thank our presenters and move on, so just give it a minute.

Okay. So, we'd like to thank Dan and the BLG team for a very informative presentation today. And thank you to all of you who joined our webinar today.

These are very interesting times, times that many of us have never seen in our careers. And, you know, I hope this has been helpful in terms of your own preparedness for helping your employees return to the workplace. Later today, we'll email you a brief survey to obtain your feedback on the webinar.

And it'll only take a couple minutes for you to complete. We'd love to hear your feedback and help us plan future events. And we'll also include a copy of the presentation a number of you have asked if it will be included, it will be. And thank you again for joining us. Have a great day and please stay safe.

Coordinator: That concludes the conference call for today. We thank you for your participation and ask that you please disconnect your lines.

Disclaimer

© Copyright Royal Bank of Canada 2020. RBC Investor & Treasury Services™ is a global brand name and is part of Royal Bank of Canada. RBC Investor & Treasury Services operates primarily through the following companies: Royal Bank of Canada, RBC Investor Services Trust and RBC Investor Services Bank S.A., and their branches and affiliates. In Luxembourg, RBC Investor Services Bank S.A. is authorized, supervised and regulated by the Commission de Surveillance du Secteur Financier (CSSF), and jointly supervised by the European Central Bank (ECB). In the United Kingdom (UK), RBC Investor & Treasury Services operates through RBC Investor Services Trust, London Branch and Royal Bank of Canada, London Branch, authorized and regulated by the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions of Canada. Authorized by the Prudential Regulation Authority. Subject to regulation by the Financial Conduct Authority and limited regulation by the Prudential Regulation Authority. Details about the extent of our regulation by the Prudential Regulation Authority are available on request. RBC Investor & Treasury Services UK also operates through RBC Europe Limited, authorized by the Prudential Regulation Authority, and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority. Additionally, RBC Investor & Treasury Services' trustee and depositary services are provided through RBC Investor Services Bank S.A., London Branch, authorized by the CSSF and ECB, and subject to limited regulation by the Financial Conduct Authority and Prudential Regulation Authority. Details about the extent of our regulation by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority are available on request. RBC Investor Services Bank S.A. maintains a representative office supervised by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. RBC Investor Services Trust (Australian Branch) is licensed and regulated by the Australian Securities and Investment Commission, Australian Financial Services licence number 295018. Details about the extent of our regulation by the Australian Securities and Investment Commission are available on request. RBC Investor Services Trust Singapore Limited is licensed by the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) as a Licensed Trust Company under the Trust Companies Act and approved by MAS to act as a trustee of collective investment schemes authorized under S286 of the Securities and Futures Act. RBC Investor Services Trust Singapore Limited is also a Capital Markets Services Licence Holder issued by MAS under the Securities and Futures Act in connection with its activities of acting as a custodian. RBC Offshore Fund Managers Limited is regulated by the Guernsey Financial Services Commission in the conduct of investment business. Registered company number 8494. RBC Fund Administration (CI) Limited is regulated by the Jersey Financial Services Commission in the conduct of fund services and trust company business in Jersey. Registered company number 52624. RBC Investor Services Bank S.A. is a restricted license bank authorized by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority to carry on certain banking business in Hong Kong. RBC Investor Services Trust Hong Kong Limited is regulated by the Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes Authority as an approved trustee. Royal Bank of Canada, Hong Kong Branch, is regulated by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority and the Securities and Futures Commission. This document is provided for general information and does not necessarily reflect individual circumstances. It does not constitute financial, tax, legal or accounting advice, and should not be relied upon in that regard. This document must not be reproduced, forwarded or otherwise made available to any third party outside the recipient's organization without the express written consent of RBC Investor & Treasury Services. Links to external websites are for convenience only. RBC Investor & Treasury Services does not review, endorse, approve, control or accept any responsibility for the content of those sites. Linking to external websites is at your own risk. ® / ™ Trademarks of Royal Bank of Canada. Used under licence.