

## Addressing Employees' Health-Related Concerns About Returning to the Workplace

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While there is still some uncertainty about COVID-19, it is widely accepted that people who have certain chronic health conditions, who are immunocompromised or who are older than age 65 are considered to be at a higher risk for becoming sick from the virus. With this in mind, members of the Workplace Return Team are working to better understand the impact of these factors on our workforce and what accommodations employees may need to mitigate any risk.

This information will be beneficial as the team continues to develop the process for returning employees to the workplace in a thoughtful and systematic manner. Those plans will be shared as they are finalized.

Understandably, there are a number of questions regarding the return to the workplace process and how it will impact higher-risk employees. The following Q&As address some of the most frequently asked questions from employees.

### **Q. What do the terms "chronic health conditions" and "immunocompromised" mean?**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) broadly defines chronic health conditions as conditions that last one year or more and require ongoing medical attention or limit activities of daily living or both.

Immunocompromised is a term for individuals whose immune mechanisms are deficient due to:

- an immunologic disorder such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection or congenital immune deficiency syndrome;
- a chronic disease like diabetes, cancer, emphysema or cardiac failure;
- immunosuppressive therapy, which could include radiation, cytotoxic chemotherapy, anti-rejection medication or steroids.

**Q. I have a chronic health condition which may compromise my immune system. If I am able to perform my job from home, will I need to report back into the office?**

Maintaining the health and safety of all employees is critical to any decision related to returning to the workplace, and the Workplace Return Team recognizes that some employees have medical concerns that may impact their ability to be in the workplace. Yet, having a chronic health condition and/or compromised immune system doesn't necessarily prevent an employee from returning to the workplace. For example, an employee whose chronic condition is well controlled with no current exacerbations may not have any increased risk upon returning to the workplace.

Leadership will continue to make every effort to provide expanded flexibility to support individual needs due to COVID-19. Employees are encouraged to talk with their supervisor regarding alternate work options available to them, which could include performing different work or continuing to work from home for an extended period of time.

**Q. I am concerned that my return to the office will put a member of my household at risk. What can I do to get my concerns addressed prior to returning to the office?**

We realize that employees may have a number of unique circumstances concerning household members that may impact employees' ability to return to the office. For example, a member of your household may be elderly, have a chronic condition and/or a compromised immune system.

It's important that you talk to your supervisor about any issues you're facing at home with returning to the workplace. Together, you can explore alternate work options that may be available to you, such as working from a different location, flexing work schedules, limiting exposure to others or continuing to work from home as needed.

In addition, educational opportunities will be provided where you can learn steps you can take upon returning home before interacting with at-risk household members to reduce their exposure risks. For example, you'll be advised to leave work coats, jackets, materials, tools and equipment in your work vehicle or at the office, if possible. You'll also learn that upon returning home, you should immediately remove work clothing and place in a paper bag or directly into a washing machine and wash in hot soapy water. It's also recommended that you shower before interacting with at-risk household members.

**Q. I'm over 65 and in good health. Should I be concerned about returning to the workplace?**

While your age automatically puts you in a higher-risk category, your good health is a much larger factor. According to the CDC, a healthy 65-year-old who continues to follow the preventive measures put in place by the company should have no concerns with returning to the workplace.

Please be aware that the company has implemented comprehensive preventive measures and protocols – such as social distancing, daily temperature checks, the use of masks, enhanced cleaning in common areas and disinfectant for personal workspaces, for example – to ensure a safe work environment. All these actions have been informed by:

- guidelines from the CDC
- orders and recommendations from the states we serve
- best practices from other companies
- input from the company's medical experts and a team of employees representing the various business units

All measures, protocols and requirements meet or exceed federal, state and local policies as well as guidelines from the CDC.

Coming soon: A guide detailing all of the steps being implemented to keep employees healthy and safe will soon be made available on the *FirstEnergy Today* portal, *Corporate Health & Safety SharePoint site* and on [myfirstrewards.com](https://myfirstrewards.com).

**Q. What about employees who have a medical condition or a family medical situation and as a result, they need to take time off from work? Can they still apply for Short-Term Disability (sick leave) and/or Family Medical Leave?**

Employees should continue to follow the normal procedures for requesting Short-Term Disability and/or Family Medical Leave that are not related to COVID-19 or the return to workplace process. Employees should contact their supervisor or their local Human Resources representative with any questions related to these programs.

**Q. I have no health concerns, but is there something I should be doing that will help ensure I stay healthy and safe when I return to the workplace?**

A number of preventive measures and protocols – related to social distancing, cleaning, health checks and corporate requirements – have been put into place to enable business operations to continue in a safe, healthy and productive manner for those returning to the workplace and for employees who have been working in the field since this health emergency began.

All employees will be asked to follow these measures, protocols and requirements to help keep themselves and their coworkers healthy and safe. Educational opportunities will be provided to employees to become acquainted with all of these measures, so everyone is fully prepared as we return to the workplace.

It's important to note that returning employees to the workplace will be gradual and follow a systematic process, with a great deal of flexibility during the roll-out process to accommodate those with health conditions, family obligations or concerns about personal health and safety.

More information about the Workplace Return Plan and considerations for high-risk employees will continue to be shared on the *FirstEnergy Today* portal, the [Corporate Health & Safety SharePoint](#) site or [myfirstrewards.com](http://myfirstrewards.com).