

# Work From Home Safely



## WORK FROM HOME EMPLOYER CONSIDERATIONS

Working from home comes with its own set of challenges. In light of the recent pandemic crisis across the globe, this practice has been rapidly adopted to keep businesses afloat. Typically, technology plays a vital role in any business continuity plan by keeping companies connected and mobile. Yet, the spread of COVID-19 across the globe is one of the worst-case scenarios a connected world can experience. Now detected in at least 172 countries with over 1 million total cases confirmed, COVID-19 is reminding us how boundless this pandemic really is. Practically all industries have been affected by the eruption of cases in the U.S., and workers' compensation insurers may soon experience a surge of claims and lawsuits related to the COVID-19.

If your company decides to embrace telecommuting, you should carefully weigh the risks and benefits of instituting a telecommuting policy to ensure it will be an asset to your organization. Here are a few

items your company should consider when working from home is elected:

- Is there a current Telecommuting Policy Review/Signature?
- Are there cyber security considerations?
- Has the actual Telecommuting Agreement been signed?
- Have you reviewed home office safety best practices?
- Has an ergonomic evaluation been scheduled?

In addition to housing all of the policies and guidelines regarding telecommuting, addressing the workspace at home and the safety concerns will help your employees remain engaged and stay on track. The following are guidelines an employer can share with employees:

### **Set a Designated Work Area**

Selecting a designated work area in your home is an important step in setting yourself up for success. This could be a spare bedroom you've turned into a home office, a desk located in the corner of the living room or even the dining room table. However, you

should try to stay away from working in your bed or on the couch, as these areas are associated with relaxation in your brain, which could negatively impact your productivity. Make sure your workspace functions efficiently for you and your work style. Treat your “home” work area as you would an office cubicle. Make your workspace a place you enjoy going to each day, an area where you can focus and do your best work.

## Plan and Test Communications

To ensure that you aren’t left out of the loop, make sure to schedule regular meetings and communications with your team, supervisors and managers. It can be easy to feel disconnected with what’s going on in the office, so remaining engaged with your co-workers is key. Communications can include emails, video conferences, telephone calls, or texts. Of course, make sure that your communication method of choice functions properly before you consistently telecommute.

## Make Sure Your Network and Work Programs are Protected

Telecommuting introduces another set of potential cyber security risks. Make sure you speak with your manager about cyber security and strategies you can use for mitigating the risk of a cyberattack while you are working from your home.

## SET UP WORK FROM HOME STAFF FOR SUCCESS

If an employee finds themselves working from home for a prolonged period of time, it is especially important to take steps to prevent ergonomic injuries. Taking small steps can go a long way to injury prevention at home. Ergonomics aims to increase efficiency and productivity while reducing discomfort and

and the likelihood of injury. Poor ergonomics can lead to not only reduced employee efficiency, but also a number of health issues that may have long-lasting effects, including damage to muscles, nerves, blood vessels, ligaments and tendons. Musculoskeletal disorders can be caused by a wide variety of tasks, many of which may seem innocent, such as sitting with poor posture or having to bend or reach repeatedly.

Many factors of ergonomics may be taken for granted in the workplace and be severely lacking in a home environment. For example, while at the office, you likely have access to a suitable desk and chair, but when you work from home, you might not have an ideal setup. Understand that your “home” workspace may not compare to your work setup, so keep in mind the goal is to get you as close as possible to these recommendations. Employees may need to improvise to create the best possible workspace environment their home can provide. Also, employers must do their best to share best practices and educate their employees when working from home is necessary, with the following safety practices:

## Workstation Considerations

In order to make your home a suitable work environment, there are a number of factors that you should consider:

- Chair – A sturdy chair that supports the curvature of the spine is ideal for working. Chairs should also allow for adjustments so that your feet can rest flat on the floor and your thighs are parallel to it. While typing, your arms should be parallel to the floor as well.

- Desk – Use a work surface, such as a desk or table, that has space underneath for your legs and feet. If a work surface is too low, adjust your chair accordingly. The situation may also be able to be corrected using sturdy supports to boost the legs of either the work surface or the chair. Cushion your wrists from the surface edge with padding or a wrist rest.
- Screen – Arrange your laptop or monitor screen directly in front of you and approximately an arm's length away with the top of the screen at, or slightly below, eye level.
- Layout – Organize files and materials so that you don't have to constantly bend and strain to reach them.
- Equipment – When using a keyboard and mouse, keep them on the same surface. Position your arms so that your hands are aligned with, or slightly below, your elbows. Make sure your wrists are straight and your upper arms stay close to your body. If you use the phone frequently, put it on speaker or use a headset in order to avoid having to cradle the phone between your head and shoulder.

## Preventing Hazards

In addition to arranging your workspace properly, you should also be aware of new risk factors that may be present.

- Be careful not to overload electrical outlets.
- Be aware of tripping hazards with power strips or extension cords running across the floor of your home.

## Taking Breaks

Even while at the office, employees shouldn't spend eight straight hours sitting at their desks. This applies to working at home as

well. Take regular breaks to stand, stretch, and move around a bit. Preventing eye strain is just as important. Look out 20 feet for 20 seconds every 20 minutes (20-20-20 rule) to give our eyes a break. You can also:

- Blink often to refresh your eyes
- Adjust the lighting and reduce glare
- Improve the air quality of your space
- Choose the right eyewear
- Adjust monitor and/or screen settings

If you need a short break to gather your thoughts, try walking around the house, down the street, stretching, or making a snack or meal. If you need to take a longer break or socialize, plan time in your schedule for this. A major advantage of working from home is having flexibility. Before you take an hour or two out of your day, make sure to communicate and check with your manager so that you remain compliant with policies.

## IN CONCLUSION

Working from home has its pros and cons. While your home may not be the ideal work environment, utilizing the strategies in this article can go a long way toward preventing unnecessary injuries during this turbulent time. Telecommuting is not the right fit for every company, but it has a decades-old record of being positive for many organizations.

## GET IN TOUCH

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