

Manager How to Support Extremely Vulnerable Employees Return to Work

Extremely Vulnerable (EV) employees are those who have been at home shielding due to their health issue(s) as advised by the Government in order to protect their health during the height of the Coronavirus pandemic.

As the employee's manager, you will naturally be their main point of contact for questions about the return to work process and how the Company will ensure their safety.

The advice for shielding is now being relaxed with dates being given for those who have been shielding to return to work if they cannot work from home. Employees who are not classed as EV (and therefore have not been advised to shield), but still have health issues, who cannot work from home, can return to work with no intervention or personal risk assessment as long as their risk on return to work is no greater than being in a supermarket.

Where employees who have been shielding request to return to work prior to the Government's advice, this can be sanctioned following personal clinical and work risk assessments, to ensure their safety with regards to Covid-19 in the workplace.

All employees who have been shielding and cannot work from home will be contacted by Occupational Health (OH) who can play a key role in identifying and managing any specific obstacles to returning to work and agreeing a return-to-work plan where necessary or appropriate. The process can be found [here](#).

Once an EV employee has had their OH Clinical Assessment, you as their line manager will receive an email report confirming the outcome of the assessment. A personal workplace risk assessment to be completed with the employee by you, prior to the employee's return to work, will be attached to the email (you can find an example one [here](#)).

When undertaking the risk assessment or even beforehand, the employee may voice concerns about coming back to work as there is likely to be a degree of anxiety / nervousness about leaving the safety of their home. Below are some questions that you could use to start a conversation with them. Not only may there be some anxiety about returning to work but there could also be some concerns about their fitness if they have a very physically active job role, especially after weeks of being confined to the home.

- How has life been?
- Are you OK about coming back?
- Do you feel safe coming back?
- How we can make your job better?
- Do you know who to talk with if any problems crop up?

Talk to them about what is currently in place in the workplace to reassure them that we have significant controls in place already i.e. risk assessments, signage, changes to working practices, PPE etc – be mindful that the individual will not have been in work when all of these things have been put into place, their reference point will be how it was before lockdown.

Manager How to Support Extremely Vulnerable Employees Return to Work

If the employee raises concerns about their anxiety levels and mental health and you are concerned that this may impact their return to work going forwards, you could call the EAP manager support line for some advice. The number is 0800 1116385.

You should also share with the employee how they and their families can access support from the EAP – telephone 0800 1116387 or email for online information <https://my-eap.com/> using the organisation code: SWWLwell

If someone has existing common health problems, questions could include:

- Do you feel up to doing your usual job with your health problem?
- What parts of your job will you find difficult because of your health problem?
- What can we change to help overcome the difficulties?
- Have you developed any other health issues or been prescribed any medication whilst you have been off work that we should be aware of or may impact your ability to do your job?
- Is there anything else you are concerned about, including anything not health-related about coming back to work?

Based on employee feedback consider any of the following if appropriate:

- Encourage them to read the information on Homesafe-me website if they have not done so already – in particular information about returning to the workplace found [here](#)
- A face to face meeting (with appropriate controls) prior to their return to work
- Sending documents via email for them to read in advance of returning to work i.e. risk assessments
- Sending photos via email of what their workplace looks like
- Putting them in contact with someone who is currently in work to discuss the reality of what it is like
- Agreeing a point of contact or someone to meet them on arrival when returning – this could be the manager or another employee
- A phased return if they are particularly anxious

If the employee raises concerns about their physical fitness to undertake their role following this period of inactivity, you may find it useful to use an employee health risk assessment to put in some steps to support the employee's return in addition to the risk assessment. If you need additional advice, please contact OHAdvice@pennon-group.co.uk where one of the OH team will help you.

As well as accessing support from the OH team, your ER advisors (EmployeeRelations@southwestwater.co.uk) and HSSA Advisors (hssa@pennon-group.co.uk) can also support you and your employee with this process.