

**STUDY**

**EMPLOYEE  
EXPECTATIONS  
ARE CHANGING  
DUE TO COVID-19**

**JUNE 2020**



## Executive Summary

The Harris Poll and the Institute for Public Relations surveyed nearly 831 adults who are employed full time from May 15 to May 17 to find out how they feel about returning to work and what safeguards they would like employers to put into place.

Non-essential employees want **safety assurances** and to **return to the office only when COVID-19 is no longer a threat**. Non-essential employees want to return to the office **only when they feel comfortable** doing so and most of them want staggered returns.

As more companies are planning for the return to work, **employees say their safety should be top-of-mind** for their employers. **Communicating effectively, outlining safety precautions, and ensuring enforcement of guidelines** will be critical as will be making sure employees have access to protections, such as sanitizers, PPEs, and physical barriers. **The COVID-19 pandemic may also have implications for the future of the open office concept.**

Safety also significantly influenced the likelihood employees would **support legislative legal protections for companies**. **Companies who demonstrate accountability for employees** were **more likely** to find support for legal protections as were companies who are **honest and open** about their shortcomings.

**Six key findings are detailed in this report.**

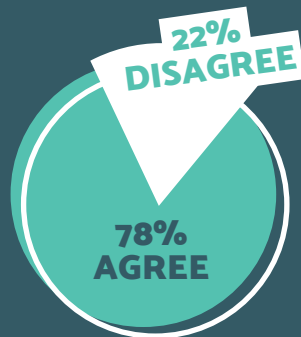
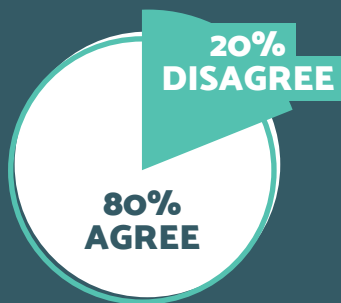
# SIX KEY FINDINGS

# 1

## Most employees want to phase out the open office concept to ensure social distancing.

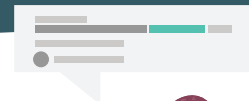
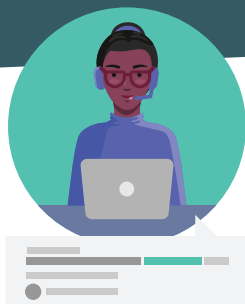
To ensure social distancing, **80%** of respondents said there should be sectioned-off offices and a phase-out of open-space offices. Additionally, more than three-quarters said employers (**78%**) should stagger employees return to the office. Nearly 9-out-of-10 (**87%**) respondents said employers must have clear guidelines outlining safety precautions before they allow employees to return to the office.

Employers should move towards sectioned-off offices and phase out open-space offices to ensure social distancing



Employers should stagger when employees are allowed to work from the office to ensure social distancing

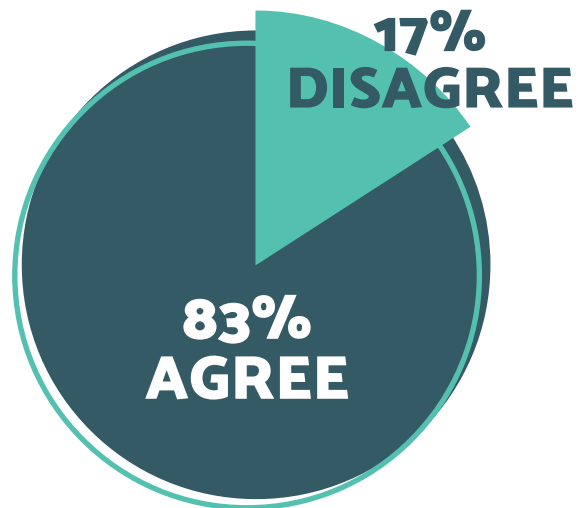
Employers must have clear guidelines outlining safety precautions before they allow employees to return to the office



# 2

**Overwhelmingly, employees don't think employers should require them to return to the office if work can be done remotely until COVID-19 is no longer a threat.**

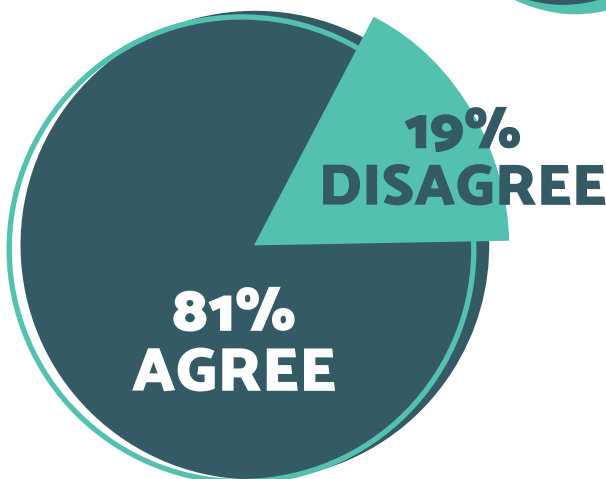
83% of respondents agreed that if work is able to be done remotely, employers should not require employees to return to the office until COVID-19 is no longer a threat.



# 3

**Most employees think they should be able to work from home until they are comfortable to return.**

81% of respondents said employees should be allowed to work from home during the pandemic until they feel comfortable to return.



# 4

## Three-quarters of employees expect workplaces to supply certain protections when they re-open.

74% of respondents say workplaces **must have** a supply of **hand sanitizer** in order to re-open. Other measures include the use of **personal protective equipment (PPE)** (58%), **physical barriers/workspaces** reconfigured for social distancing (56%), and **temperature tests** (55%).



**74%**  
HAND  
SANITIZER



**55%**  
TEMPERATURE  
TESTS



**58%**  
PPE (MASKS/  
RESPIRATORS)



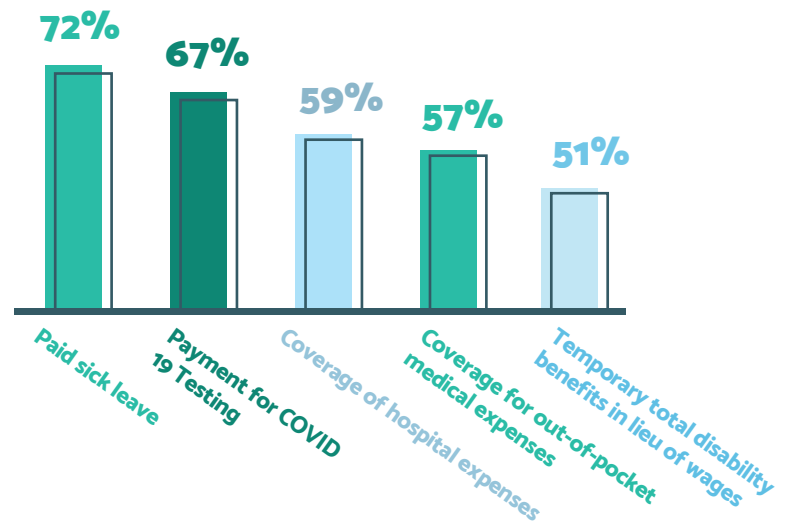
**56%**  
BARRIERS/ WORK  
SPACES RECONFIGURED  
FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING



# 5

## Employees expect their employer to provide certain benefits if they contract COVID-19 at work.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents said they should be entitled to paid sick leave (72%) while two-thirds (67%) said they should receive payment for COVID-19 testing if they contract COVID-19 at work.

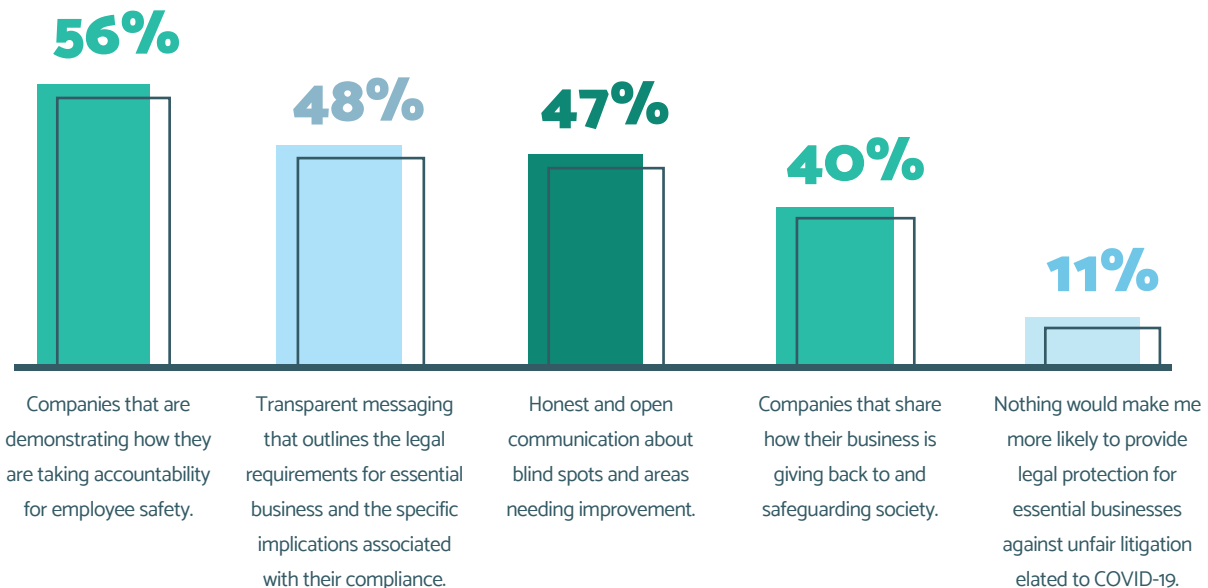


# 6

## Americans are more likely to support legal protection if companies demonstrate accountability for employee safety.

Employees are more likely to support reforms under consideration in Congress to provide legal protection for essential businesses against unfair litigation related to COVID-19 if certain safeguards are in place. The top two that would create more support include companies demonstrating how they are taking accountability for public safety (56%), and honest and open communication about blind spots and areas needing improvement (47%).

**Which of the following would make you more likely to support reforms under consideration in Congress to provide legal protection for essential businesses against unfair litigation related to COVID-19 (e.g., employee lawsuits for unsafe working conditions) as they reopen and bring workers back?**



## M E T H O D O L O G Y

This survey was conducted online within the U.S. by The Harris Poll from May 15 to 17, 2020 among a nationally representative sample of 831 full-time employees. The margin of error is +/- 3 percent.