# A SAFE RETURN TO WORK

*A guide for employers during COVID-19 from
The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center*

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*A guide for employers during COVID-19*

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## MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

As our country cautiously reopens amid the COVID-19 outbreak, business leaders are facing challenges unlike any we have seen. In just a few months, routine workplace safety has drastically changed, leaving many questioning how best to create an environment where their employees can feel secure, healthy and productive.

The moments ahead are crucial. The way companies respond to these formidable challenges—and the care they show their employees and customers—will be key to the success and longevity of their operations.

We have created this guide to help you succeed.

At The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, we are deeply committed to improving lives around the globe through innovation in research, education and patient care. This critical mission drives us and, during extraordinary public health challenges such as COVID-19, uniquely positions us as a trusted resource for our community and its leaders. It's our responsibility and privilege to draw from our depth of expertise in medicine, infectious diseases and patient safety, as well as our extensive experience in sanitation and building maintenance and design, to offer this guidance for fortifying your company's safety practices.

The COVID-19 pandemic will not end overnight. Our nation's recovery hinges on our collective and tireless long-term efforts. We are grateful for the opportunity to share our knowledge as we move forward together.

**Hal Paz, MD, MS**
*Executive Vice President and Chancellor for Health Affairs,*
*The Ohio State University*
*Chief Executive Officer, Ohio State Wexner Medical Center*

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## ABOUT THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

One of the nation's leading academic health centers, The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center offers health care services in virtually every specialty and subspecialty in medicine. Thousands of patients come to us each month for treatments and services they can't find anywhere else. Providing access to health care information is central to our research, education and patient care mission.

Among our recognitions:

- *U.S. News & World Report* has recognized us in its list of America's "Best Hospitals" ranking, based on quality, outcomes and reputation, for 27 consecutive years.
- Eleven Ohio State specialties have been in the top 10% nationally, and we've received the highest possible rating for eight common procedures and conditions.
- We're one of only 64 members of a National Institutes of Health consortium that speeds the translation of scientific discovery into better patient care.
- We're nationally recognized for our commitment to inclusiveness and diversity as well as our information technology innovations and our efforts in creating sustainability programming.

At Ohio State Wexner Medical Center, we're dedicated to improving health in Ohio and across the world through innovation in research, education and patient care. This is our promise to our community and to people all across the globe.

## HOW THIS GUIDE CAN HELP YOU

This resource offers expert guidance from The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, the Ohio Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to help you guard your employees, your customers and your business from the potentially damaging effects of COVID-19.

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. Our best defense is avoiding exposure.

As you shape your strategy to avoid COVID-19 exposure while reopening and reimagining your business, keep two overarching ideas in mind: the most successful companies will be those that **remain transparent** in their communications and **build wall after wall of protection** against COVID-19.

### Transparent communication

Your employees are feeling uncertain right now. They're looking to you for guidance. Do not leave them to wonder. At every step, you should be clear about what you're doing to monitor and prevent the spread of disease within your company. Frequent, consistent communication will go a long way toward easing employee and customer concerns.

Also, stay flexible. What we know about COVID-19 is changing daily, as are our individual worries about the disease. Listen to employees and adapt your communications and operations. The way you've always done things might not suit today's environment.

### Layers of protection

Handwashing is a fantastic, scientifically proven way to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It's even stronger when you combine it with another layer of protection: a mask covering the mouth and nose. Adding 6 feet of distance makes it even tougher on COVID-19. The more obstacles you place between your employees and COVID-19, the stronger you'll be in preventing the spread of disease.

In the following pages, we'll outline the best ways to keep safe, and **we recommend that you use all of them**.

## IDENTIFYING COVID-19 IN THE WORKPLACE

Health experts strongly recommend that all employees who are able to work from home should be working from home. For those who must report, routine monitoring will help you and your employees track their well-being and identify possible areas of concern.

### Employee screening

**DAILY HEALTH CHECK-IN**

Instruct your employees to report to work only if they can confirm:

✔ No fever     ✔ No symptoms     ✔ No known exposure

### Fever

Employees should take their temperature with a thermometer prior to coming to work. If you're monitoring at work, it's best to use a touchless thermometer, but if you must use an oral thermometer or another type, make sure to clean and disinfect it thoroughly between each use. Screeners should wear proper eye and face protection as well as disposable gloves if they'll be coming in contact with employees.

### Symptoms
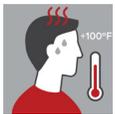
Fever

Body aches

Respiratory symptoms, such as dry cough or shortness of breath

Chills

Sore throat

Loss of taste or smell

Headache

COVID-19 symptoms may appear 2 – 14 days after exposure. Keep in mind, many people with COVID-19 have mild symptoms and are able to recover at home.

**Download, print and share our quick reference guide to COVID-19 symptoms and exposure.**

## If an employee has a fever or is experiencing symptoms:

Tell them to stay home or send them home to avoid spreading virus to others. **They should contact their primary care physician. If they don't have one, call Ohio State Telehealth Immediate Care at 614-293-3200.**

## Call 911 if employee is experiencing:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion or inability to arouse
- Bluish lips or face

Inform 911 or emergency department medical staff of any COVID-19 symptoms prior to their arrival.

## Known exposure

Employees who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 should:

- **Self-quarantine for 14 days**
- Practice strict cough etiquette (covering coughs or sneezes with sleeves) and hand hygiene
- Call their primary care provider if they experience symptoms

## Visiting the doctor

If your employee is feeling unwell but is concerned about visiting a health care facility, they may consider a telehealth appointment. All it takes is a tablet, smartphone or computer.

At Ohio State, we've leveraged the power of our technology and our deep medical expertise to create high-quality telehealth experiences for our patients. We're able to diagnose, treat and screen for a long list of medical conditions remotely, saving patients the time, expense and hassle of an in-person appointment. Doctors, including specialists, can perform many of the same tasks as they would for an in-person visit, including prescribing medication.

Our telehealth services boomed during the COVID-19 pandemic, with 98% of our providers holding more than 130,000 telehealth visits. Many patients have found comfort in receiving our care while never leaving home—a majority said they would recommend video visits to others.

Call to schedule a telehealth appointment: **614-366-5555**

Telehealth Immediate Care for same-day appointments: **614-293-3200**

**LEARN MORE**

**LEARN MORE**

## DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE COVID-19 TESTING PLAN— BEFORE YOU NEED IT

A COVID-19 outbreak could have disastrous consequences for your business. Ohio State Wexner Medical Center experts can help you develop a testing and COVID-19 management strategy to keep your workplace safe and open—even if you experience an outbreak.

We'll help you cut through the confusion of the testing process while designing a risk management plan that's tailored specifically for your workplace.

Our services may include:

- **Individual testing (viral and antibody)**
- Surveillance testing
- Outbreak prevention and management
- On-demand consultants

As the Ohio Department of Health's reference laboratory for COVID-19 testing, the Ohio State Wexner Medical Center has processed a significant share of the tests performed in Ohio and distributed hundreds of thousands of testing kits to hospitals and care facilities across the state.

We're a leader in COVID-19 rapid test development and currently have more than 100 COVID-19 research projects underway.

Our science-based methods are driven by data, and CDC and World Health Organization guidance, and provide reliable recommendations that will help you make the best strategic decisions to protect your business.

Getting ahead of a COVID-19 workplace disaster is the best way to prevent one. To arrange a consultation, contact Executive Director of Civic and Community Engagement Beth NeCamp at **Beth.Necamp@osumc.edu**.

## What to do if an employee has COVID-19

**READ MORE**

Sick employees should stay home except to get medical care.

- For patients who have been tested, no returning to work until all of the following are true:
    - No fever without use of fever-reducing medications
    - Improvement in cough and shortness of breath
    - Negative results (showing no COVID-19) on at least two consecutive lab tests of respiratory specimens collected at least 24 hours apart
- For patients who haven't been tested, no returning to work until all of the following are true:
    - At least three full days (72 hours) have passed since recovery (no fever without use of fever-reducing medications and improvement in cough and shortness of breath)
    - At least 10 days have passed since the onset of symptoms
- If at any time a doctor confirms the cause of a fever or other symptoms is not COVID-19 and approves an employee's return to work, the employee can return.

## Follow CDC-recommended cleaning guidelines.

- Close off areas used by the person who is sick. If you can close off affected areas, you don't necessarily need to close operations.
- Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area.
- To limit exposure, wait 24 hours before you clean or disinfect. If 24 hours is not feasible, wait as long as possible.
- Clean and disinfect all areas used by the person who is sick, such as offices, bathrooms and common areas, and shared electronic equipment like tablets, touchscreens, keyboards, remote controls and ATMs.
- Once areas have been appropriately disinfected, they can be opened immediately for use.
- Workers who haven't had close contact with the sick employee can return to work immediately after disinfection. Others should follow known exposure (see page 8) guidelines.

## PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

As stated earlier, there are many ways to keep your employees and customers safe from COVID-19, and they are most effective when used together. We recommend that you take all of the following steps to stop the spread of COVID-19. The following pages will show you how to do this in detail.
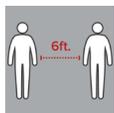
**Handwashing and hand sanitizer**

**Cleaning and disinfecting**

**Masks**

**Healthy habits**

**Social distancing**

**Prepare to offer these infection control supplies in your workplace. Make sure you have plenty on hand.**

- Tissues
- No-touch trash cans
- Hand soap
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer at main points of entry/exit or when hand soap and water is not available
- Disposable towels
- Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Disinfecting wipes, cleaners or sprays

## Handwashing and hand sanitizer

Hand hygiene is an easy and effective way to prevent the spread of infections. The best way to keep your hands clean is with soap and water, but when you can't get to a sink to wash your hands, hand sanitizer is a good second-best choice.

## When to wash your hands

- **Before, during** and **after** preparing food
- **Before** eating food
- **Before** and **after** treating a cut or wound
- **After** using the toilet
- **After** blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- **After** touching an animal, animal feed or animal waste
- **After** touching garbage

## During the COVID-19 pandemic, you should also clean hands:

- After you have been in a public place and touched an item or surface that may be frequently touched by other people, such as door handles, tables, gas pumps, shopping carts or electronic cash registers/screens, etc.
- Before touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

## Proper handwashing technique

**1** **Wet your hands** with clean, running water (warm or cold), and apply soap.

**2** **Lather your hands** with the soap, getting the backs of your hands, between your fingers and under your nails.

**3** **Scrub your hands** for at least 20 seconds. (Hum the "Happy Birthday" song to yourself twice through for a timer.)

**4** **Rinse hands** well with clean, running water.

**5** **Dry hands** with a clean towel, or air dry them.

## Hand sanitizer

- Read the ingredients and make sure the sanitizer is alcohol-based. You'll want at least 60% alcohol, but ideally 70%.
- Use enough to adequately cover all the surfaces of your hands and between your fingers. The recommendation is a dollop the size of a quarter, but if you notice that your hands are dry and you haven't got good coverage, do it again.

### Wearing a mask

Studies have shown that a significant portion of people with coronavirus lack symptoms and that even those who eventually develop symptoms can transmit the virus to others before showing symptoms.

In other words, we can never be 100% certain that we do not have the virus. This is why wearing a mask is an important safety step we can take to protect others.

Because the virus can spread between people interacting in close proximity—speaking, coughing or sneezing—the CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings where social distancing measures are difficult to maintain — that is, where you can't reliably keep 6 feet of distance between people.

Employers are obligated to provide workers with the PPE needed to keep employees safe while performing their jobs.

The cloth face coverings we recommend for basic use are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators, which remain critical supplies that should be reserved for health care workers and other medical first responders. Cloth face coverings made at home from common materials can be used as an additional, voluntary public health measure. Here are directions for making your own cloth mask.

**CLICK FOR DIRECTIONS**

## Putting on, removing and caring for your mask

- Wash your hands well before putting the mask on and after taking it off.
- Also wash your hands if you touch your mask to adjust it. Use soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Fit elastic bands behind your ears, or tie the top ties at the middle of your head and the bottom ties around the back of your neck. If applicable, pinch the wire at the top of the mask edge around the top of your nose to make a snug fit.
- Pull the bottom of the mask down over your chin. Be sure the mask covers your nose and mouth.
- Try to avoid touching the mask to prevent spreading germs to or from the mask.
- Before you remove your mask, wash your hands well.
- Remove the mask without touching the front of the mask.
- You can include your face covering with your regular laundry or wash by hand using a solution of 5 tablespoons (1/3 cup) bleach per gallon of room temperature water. Soak for five minutes and rinse thoroughly. Allow to dry completely.

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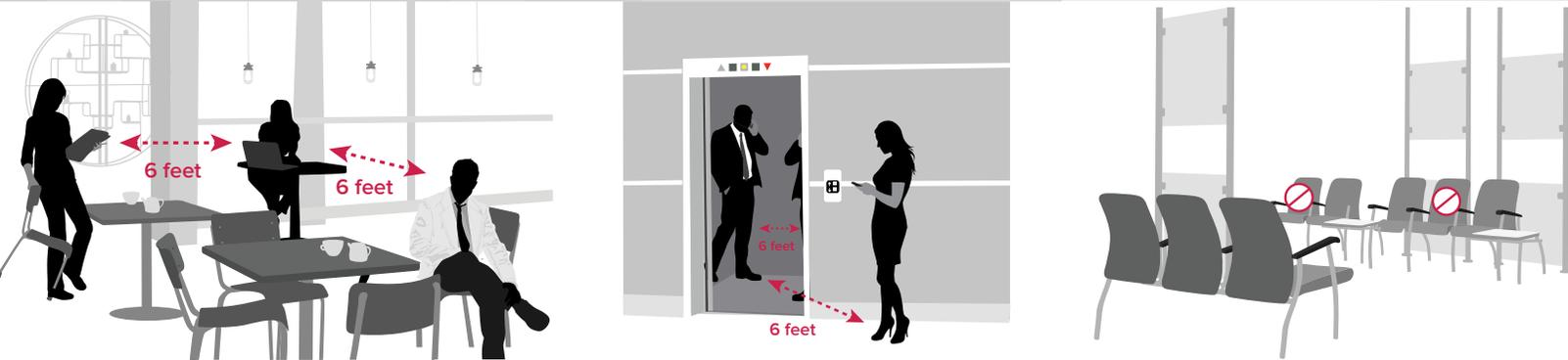
## SOCIAL DISTANCING

"Social distancing"—which is actually about the physical distance we keep between ourselves and others—prevents sick people from coming into contact with healthy people. During the COVID-19 pandemic, you should practice as much social distancing as possible at the workplace.

### Create at least 6 feet of physical space between employees as well as customers

- Space out your computers/work stations and limit the sharing of work stations (clean and disinfect in between). **See our guide** for detailed workspace distancing directions.
- Use tape or decals to measure distances on floors and post signs in potential gathering areas such as front desks, waiting rooms and break rooms. Space these areas appropriately as well.
- Where there is significant employee/customer interaction, consider installing clear counter shields, which should be regularly wiped down with surface cleaner.

### Limit how many people are in your business at any given time

- Allow your employees to work from home when possible.
- Schedule virtual meetings/events when social distancing guidelines can't be met.
- Stagger breaks and meal times.
- Explore flexible work hours such as staggered shifts and non-traditional schedules.

### Take additional safety precautions

- Post handwashing reminders and set up hand sanitizer stations in high-traffic areas.
- Discourage hand shaking, hugs and fist bumping.
- Require lids on drinking cups and water bottles.
- Encourage employees to use disposable tableware and other materials during meals and breaks.

## CLEANING AND DISINFECTING

If your business doesn't routinely clean and disinfect throughout the day, you may need to develop a plan and policies for employees to follow. It's important to educate workers responsible for cleaning, laundry and trash pick-up on proper protection and recognizing the symptoms of COVID-19. The following guidance comes from the CDC:

- Wear disposable gloves to clean and disinfect.
- Clean surfaces using soap and water to reduce germs, then use disinfectant to kill remaining germs.
- Use an **EPA-registered household disinfectant** and follow the directions on the label. Many of us use disinfectants improperly.
- Routinely clean high-touch surfaces and objects, including tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets and sinks.
- If you have multiple customers handling surfaces and objects—such as shopping carts and point-of-sale keypads—these should be cleaned and disinfected between each use.

**For electronics, such as tablets, touchscreens, keyboards, remote controls and ATM machines:**

- Consider putting wipeable covers on electronics.
- Follow manufacturer's instruction for cleaning and disinfecting.
- If there's no guidance, use alcohol-based wipes or sprays containing at least 70% alcohol. Dry surface thoroughly.

**For clothing, towels, linens and other items:**

- Launder items according to the manufacturer's instructions. Use the warmest appropriate water setting and dry items completely.
- If possible, wear disposable gloves when handling dirty laundry from a person who is sick.
- Do not shake dirty laundry.
- Clean and disinfect clothes hampers according to guidance above for surfaces.
- Remove gloves and wash hands right away.

## HEALTHY HABITS

While this guide details precautions your company should take during the time of COVID-19, there are many health practices you and your employees should be following now and always to stay healthy, prevent disease and promote well-being in the workplace.

**Cover your mouth and nose** with a tissue or sleeve when you sneeze or cough.

**Avoid touching your eyes,** nose or mouth with unwashed hands.

**Stay home when you're sick.**

**Wash your hands often with soap and water.**

**Get adequate sleep.**

**Eat well-balanced meals.**

**Stay hydrated.**

**Do not smoke, vape or allow others to smoke or vape around you.** If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about programs and medicines to help you quit.

**Reach out to family, friends and neighbors** to stay in touch and to get any help you may need.
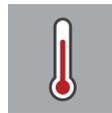
**Monitor your health.**
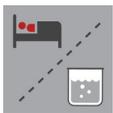
**Establish a patient relationship with a primary care physician.**

## MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Your employees are no doubt unsettled. Many are dealing with their personal ties and losses to COVID-19, major disruptions in child care, fear of losing their jobs and overall uncertainty about what the coming months and years may look like.

Those who may respond more strongly to the stress of a crisis include front-line and essential workers as well as those who have lost their jobs, had their work hours reduced or had other major changes to their employment.

**Stress during COVID-19 is something to take seriously. It may cause:**

- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Worsening of mental health conditions
- Increased use of **tobacco** and/or **alcohol and other substances**

**Encourage your employees to talk about how they're feeling, and watch for symptoms of their stress:**

- Feeling irritation, anger or denial
- Feeling uncertain, nervous or anxious
- Lacking motivation
- Feeling tired, overwhelmed or burned out
- Feeling sad or depressed
- Trouble sleeping
- Trouble concentrating

**Ohio State resources for managing COVID-19 stress**

- **Coping with COVID-19**: Practical coping tips from the clinical staff of the **Stress, Trauma And Resilience (STAR) Program** of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health and Harding Hospital.
- **Reducing COVID-19 anxiety**: Evidence-based strategies and tips from Ohio State's chief wellness officer ranging from how to talk to your children about COVID-19 to staying well while working from home.
- **News and advice** from health care providers across Ohio State, including:
  - **How to cope with 'crisis fatigue'**
  - **Why feelings of grief and loss are normal during COVID-19**
  - **Why is COVID-19 making me so angry?**

## Find help

When stress becomes too much, there are resources for help. Make sure your employees are aware of your employee assistance program resources, and post and share these resources to help those who may be struggling or experiencing a crisis. In an emergency, call 911.

### Find a local health care provider or treatment

- **Find a primary care provider or specialist**.

- **Ohio State Behavioral Health**: 614-293-9600. For all in-person visits, you can feel confident that our locations are safe. We've taken significant measures to minimize the risk of the spread of COVID-19 and ensure that our patients are protected.

  - **Ohio State's Neurological Institute** is one of Columbus' top programs for psychiatry and behavioral health. We have over 200 medical, surgical and research specialists dedicated to the treatment of patients with neurological and psychiatric disorders. **Our Psychiatry and Behavioral Health Department** believes in treating the whole patient and addressing the connections between mental and physical health, giving each individual the support, care and respect they deserve.

- **Telehealth**: 614-366-5555. For patients who can't or prefer not to schedule an in-person visit. Accessible from a smartphone, tablet or computer.

- **Telehealth Immediate Care**: 614-293-3200 or **schedule online**. Same-day care via video or telephone for patients 14 and older.

### If you feel you or someone in your household may harm themselves or someone else:

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**: 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) and TTY 1-800-799-4889

- **The Online Lifeline Crisis Chat** is free and confidential. You'll be connected to a skilled, trained counselor in your area.

- **National Domestic Violence Hotline**: 1-800-799-7233 and TTY 1-800-787-3224

## COPING TIPS FOR EMPLOYEES

Share this expert advice for optimizing your mental and physical health during COVID-19.

### Overall, have realistic expectations

Right now, the duration of this pandemic is unknown. There are many factors that will ultimately determine the path of this illness. Taking time for a deep breath is important. Working smarter—not harder—is important.

- Make certain you're getting enough rest.
- Eat healthy, nutritious meals.
- Check in with friends and family members.
- Engage with your children and parents. Even if you can't visit in person, call them, text them or reach out to them on social media.
- Take care of your spiritual well-being; understand that this is going to be a marathon, not a sprint. Consider what type of energy is needed to get through this difficult time.

## Be mindful

- Pause to clear your mind when you enter your workspace.
- Slow your breathing. Taking several slow, deep breaths will help center you.
- Be aware of your body. If your stress is carried in your neck and shoulders, then stretch, roll your head to the left and to the right, and roll your shoulders, making circles with them.
- Do this several times throughout the day to build your energy and stamina.

## Clear your head with mini breaks

- Work with your team to build in mini breaks throughout your shift. Even a 10-minute break can be helpful.
- Take a walk during the day or grab a healthy snack. Think about what's calming for you and improves vital energy and focus. This can work both in the home and in the workplace.
- If you can, plan downtime at home. Think of potential distraction activities that work well for you, whether that's a good book, movie, podcast, games with your family or mindfulness techniques. They all help us refuel physically and emotionally.

## Stay healthy

- Maximize healthy eating by packing several small-plate workday meals, including fruit, nuts, cheese, yogurt and other energy snacks.
- Limit alcohol and any other mind-altering substances. While these may relax you in the short term, the long-term effects won't be as effective as eating right and practicing positive stress-reducing activities.

## Keep moving

Many experts say that moving for a minimum of 30 minutes per day is key to maintaining both physical and emotional wellness. The key is finding something that you can and will do. Some options:

- Walking, biking, running and hiking
- Playing a game of fetch with your pet
- Stretching and yoga are excellent forms of movement

## Stay connected

- When you get home, interact with those in your household. Check in on children's schoolwork and provide them with positive and supportive feedback. Schedule a family movie night. Be creative—there are many ways to connect with your loved ones and disconnect from the pressures of the workplace.
- Social distancing doesn't mean social isolation. Reach out to family, friends and colleagues to maintain social contact via FaceTime, Zoom, Skype or Google Hangouts to reduce your isolation.
- Consider joining another family or friend for a meal by social media to reduce isolation for everyone.

## Think outside the box

We need to think differently about what we're prioritizing and how we can best meet the increased demand for care, social distancing and other unique stressors. It's time to think outside the box, especially when things are chaotic and are beginning to feel out of control. It's OK to ask for support, evaluate your needs and adjust your coping skills in a way that will help you move forward.

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As what we know about COVID-19 changes, so could the information contained in this guide. For reliable, up-to-date information, visit:

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**Subscribe to our e-newsletter** and get tips from Ohio State experts right to your inbox.

**DOWNLOAD THE OHIO STATE MYHEALTH APP**

*To find a provider:*
**wexnermedical.osu.edu/find-a-doctor**

*To schedule an appointment:*
Call 614-293-8000
**Telehealth**: 614-366-5555
**Telehealth Immediate Care** (same-day appointments): 614-293-3200

We're partnering with companies across Ohio to provide trusted, proven workplace safety strategies during COVID-19 and beyond. To learn more, contact Executive Director of Civic and Community Engagement Beth NeCamp at **Beth.Necamp@osumc.edu**.

*go.osu.edu/returntowork*