

# Employee Return to Work Checklist:

A Step-by-Step Guide for  
Healthcare HR Teams



# The Critical Importance of Return-to-Work Processes in Healthcare Organizations

Leave management in healthcare has specific challenges that make it more complex than other organizations. With strict staffing guidelines and regulations, nearly every employee that goes on leave must be replaced temporarily with another skilled worker. Some healthcare employees must also meet fitness for duty requirements before resuming a role, adding another layer of complexity for HR teams to manage.

In a recent survey, 55% of healthcare HR teams reported an increase in leave requests in 2023 – with most seeing 20% or more requests than in previous years. More employees going on leave means more employees returning from leave. As the healthcare industry faces major challenges with recruitment and retention, it's more critical than ever to make sure your return-to-work processes are clear, comprehensive, compliant, and supportive.

In a recent survey, we asked healthcare employees who had recently taken a leave of absence about their experiences. Positive leave experiences improved loyalty, productivity, and a sense of belonging. However, negative leave experiences had an outsized, direct impact on retention. Of the healthcare employees who reported a negative leave and return-to-work experience, **46% decided to look for a new job or didn't come back to work.**

## How Return to Work Preparation Impacts Leave Experiences

### Negative Experience

*"I felt rushed back to work and wasn't given enough time to get back into working."*

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*"I was expected to come back three weeks after having an emergency C-section."*

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*"They could have been more worried about me as a person and less worried about my return."*

### Positive Experience

*"It was an easy process to follow and I was given time to get myself together to come back."*

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*"They called and checked up on me."*

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*"I experienced no disruptions to my pay and my coworkers and manager supported my leave."*



Comprehensive return-to-work programs are central to making sure healthcare organizations can deliver critical care and operate smoothly. Other benefits of improving your return-to-work process include:

### **Improved employee experience, satisfaction, and retention**

With a clear process for returning to work, employees don't struggle with added stress during a challenging time in their lives. By making it easy for them to know what to expect and that the organization will be ready for their return, you are showing employees that you value both their time and experience. Returning to work the right way can boost morale, help people recover by "getting back into the swing of things," and help them feel valued.

### **Better operations, patient care, and service quality**

A well-considered return-to-work process brings employees back to work at just the right time. This brings back valuable healthcare providers that patients and colleagues rely on for quality care. In healthcare organizations, it's very important to communicate when critical providers will be returning to work. That way patients, supervisors, and co-workers know what to expect, and have the information they need to be ready for the provider to come back.

### **Ensuring compliance with FMLA and state leave laws**

With FMLA and numerous state leave laws, it's important to understand what protections employees have while out on leave. If someone needs more leave than what they initially requested and received, it's important to have a process that helps them fully understand their options under federal laws, state programs, and company policies.



### **Staying compliant with the ADA/ADAAA**

Many times, employees need workplace accommodations to perform their role after returning from leave. Staying compliant with the ADA means going through the interactive process for every workplace accommodation request, even temporary ones that are part of an employee's return to work. Making sure your return-to-work program includes the interactive process when required will help keep your organization compliant.



### **Reducing replacement worker costs and avoiding complaints**

When people come back at the right time (before a leave is over-exhausted), your organization won't overspend on replacement workers. Healthcare organizations can also avoid complaints and workers' compensation requests by making sure everyone – the employee, the manager, and their colleagues, are all healthy and prepared for the return to work.



### **Tracking any necessary fitness for duty requirements**

There are many times when an employee takes a leave of absence to manage their own serious health condition. If they hold certain types of jobs, a fitness for duty examination or certification may be required before they return to work. With a comprehensive return-to-work program, you can make sure that these requirements are met and tracked every time they are applicable.





# Employee Return to Work Checklist

**If you are ready to create or improve your organization's return to work program, here is a quick checklist to review.**

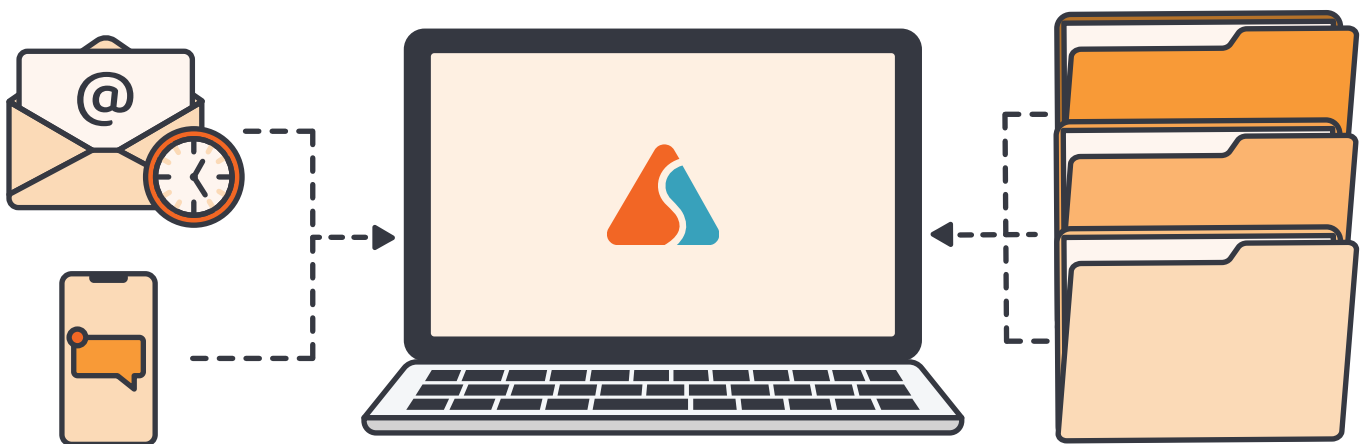
- ☐ Communicate all expectations of your process to the employee, including the expected time and date of return and any fitness for duty requirements, before they return to work. You can use text, email, or mail, or a combination of the three to make sure you communicated what they need to do in writing so they can refer to it later.
- ☐ Take the time to fully identify the essential functions of the employee's role by reviewing their job description. You can talk to the manager or supervisor if you need to.
- ☐ Track fitness for duty requirements, when applicable.
- ☐ Understand any restrictions or limitations the employee may have before they return to work, even if they are temporary.
- ☐ When applicable, review any potential accommodations requests under the ADA or PWFA
- ☐ Reach out to the employee to discuss, evaluate, and finalize any accommodations they might need before returning to work.
- ☐ Review any relevant leave of absence guidelines and laws, depending on the kind of leave they are taking.
- ☐ Notify the employee's manager or supervisor of the date the employee will return to work. Make sure they understand any restrictions or limitations the employee has. Communicate any requirements the manager needs to fulfill.
- ☐ Notify IT and any other department of the date the employee will return to work to ensure all required access and permissions are restored.
- ☐ Request, gather, and store any necessary medical releases.
- ☐ Keep the employee notified of any relevant updates to the organization or their role before they return to work.

# How Technology Helps

Looking at the checklist above, it's easy to see how much time it can take to ensure a smooth return to work for every employee that goes on leave. Leave technology like AbsenceSoft can help streamline your return-to-work process, giving each employee a smooth, streamlined experience without spending hours your HR team doesn't have.

With AbsenceSoft you can:

- ✓ Automate communications to go out at certain times throughout the leave process
- ✓ Customize workflows to make sure all necessary fitness for duty requirements are met and tracked
- ✓ Quickly create and send custom communications
- ✓ Track time taken and return to work dates
- ✓ Use the guided EEOC-compliant interactive process to determine and track accommodations
- ✓ Notify managers, employees, IT, and others automatically via email or text
- ✓ Centrally record and store medical releases and other important documents



To learn more about how AbsenceSoft can improve your return-to-work program, [\*\*schedule a demo today.\*\*](#)