

Return-to-Work Policy

Purpose

Employees who become medically restricted and are unable to perform the essential functions of their job for a temporary period may be considered for job modifications to enable a return to work (RTW) during that period of time. This policy and process applies to all U.S. full- and part-time employees.

Goals of the RTW Program

The goals of the company's RTW program are:

- to reduce lost time or significant work disruption due to injury or illness, and
- to encourage employees who are off work due to an injury or illness to return to work as part of the normal recovery process.

The company desires to do this by creating a uniform but flexible program that:

- Supports a timely and medically safe return to work
- Creates a systematic way for managers to address the issues concerned with returning employees to work
- Enables the continued productivity and safety of those employees with chronic conditions

Policy

The company is committed to retaining its valuable workforce and is interested in protecting the health and welfare of all employees. Return-to-work arrangements are a temporary measure intended to allow employees with medical restrictions or impairments to continue in a modified-duty assignment or to bridge the gap between full absence and a return to full duty. RTW arrangements are provided for both occupational and non-occupational illness or injury.

Our company-wide RTW policy outlines our program, key resources, and where to go for help. All requests for RTW will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and will recognize the unique circumstances of each employee and the business needs of the work group.

The company's RTW policy helps strengthen its competitive position and helps ensure employees receive their valuable benefits — with the help of health, disability, and Human Resource representatives who will assist throughout the process.

The company takes a team approach to return to work. The RTW team is comprised of:

- The employee's direct supervisor
- A site leadership representative
- The company's health professional (if applicable)
- RTW coordinator
- Safety professional
- Human Resource representative

Intent

The intent of return to work is to provide temporary transitional work assignments for employees with medical restrictions that impact their ability to do the essential functions of their job following an illness or injury.

Duration

RTW arrangements are considered on a case-by-case basis, depending on the employee's present condition and capabilities. Such work arrangements are temporary and short-term (typically two (2) weeks in initial duration). In some circumstances, based on an employee's progress and ability to function at work, temporary modified duty may be extended to support continued recovery but is not to exceed two (2) months.

If an employee's impairment is expected to be long-term or indefinite, the company will work with the employee in an interactive process to determine whether a long-term accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act is feasible.

Transitional Work Assignments

If an employee is currently working but becomes medically restricted, a transitional work assignment (TWA) will be considered, allowing the employee to continue productive work in a modified assignment. Often such modified duty speeds the recovery process for the employee and allows the business unit to retain a valued and skilled employee. An example of modified duty may be a situation in which an employee incurs an injury at home over the weekend but is still able to work, provided lifting activities can be limited for two (2) weeks.

Job modifications will be based on the employee's current capabilities and function and will take into account normal job responsibilities and essential functions. In addition, business needs will be reviewed and the impact on the work group considered, ensuring goals can be met during the requested transitional work assignment period.

The priority of consideration for transitional work is as follows:

1. Full schedule with limited duties
2. Limited schedule with full duties
3. Full or limited schedule with modified duties
4. Full or limited schedule with a medically acceptable task list

It is expected that an employee will engage in a transitional work assignment with their original team and department. However, if there are no medically acceptable transitional work duties available, that employee will be placed with a different department in the same geographic location as an alternative. Should no medically acceptable duties be available at the regular work site, the company will work with the individual to find suitable work-hardening opportunities outside the regular place of employment.

Examples of Transitional Work Assignments

TWAs may involve modifications to the physical or cognitive demands of a job, work schedule, and ergonomic requirements. Some examples of modifications are:

- Flexible or reduced work schedule
- Limits to physical job demands (e.g., lifting, bending, stretching, standing)
- Reassigned job duties or sharing job duties with other employees
- Ergonomic adjustments and/or equipment
- Assistive technology (e.g., screen reader, enlarged text, closed captioning)

TWAs generally do not include restrictions such as:

- Commute to work must be no more than 10 miles
- Must be assigned to a new supervisor
- Cannot meet current productivity standards

How TWA Works

Temporary Job Modifications

If an employee is currently working and requires a job modification based on an illness or injury (on or off the job) or an employee is currently on disability and is able to return to work in a modified capacity, *then...*

The employee advises his or her supervisor of the current medical restrictions, and the supervisor, in turn, alerts the company's RTW Coordinator. In many cases, the local supervisor can provide an adequate TWA with no additional support needed.

If not...

The employee or his/her treating healthcare provider advises the company's RTW Coordinator or local RTW representative and job modifications are explored.

If...

The employee or the treating healthcare provider forwards information regarding the employee's medical restrictions to the company's health professional directly, *then...*

The RTW coordinator and local RTW representative review the medical restrictions (and any recommended job modifications) provided by the healthcare provider. The RTW coordinator or the local RTW representative may send a copy of the employee's job description and/or essential functions to the healthcare provider, if necessary.

If...

The employee discusses the medical restrictions, job duties, and possible alternatives with their supervisor, the local RTW representative, or the RTW coordinator, *then...*

The supervisor and local RTW representative with the support of the RTW coordinator will work with other members of the RTW team to consider job modifications within the employee's current work assignment. The team takes into account the business unit's ability to provide modified duty. Start and end dates are established when a job modification is agreed upon and approved.

If...

The employee either remains at work in a modified job assignment or is disabled but returns to work with a job modification, *then...*

The supervisor and local RTW representative will assess the employee's ability to do the transitional work assignment, based on job functioning, and will work with the employee and the RTW team to consider further modifications, if necessary.

If...

The employee's condition improves to a full-duty release status and he or she returns to full duty within the approved period or the employee remains medically restricted, *then...*

The local RTW representative secures a release from the healthcare provider confirming that the employee is able to resume normal job functioning OR the supervisor and the local RTW representative discuss the employee's ongoing medical restrictions and job functioning with the employee and request additional medical information from the treating healthcare provider, if necessary. The supervisor and the local RTW representative, with the input from the RTW committee, determine whether the TWA can be extended and whether the business unit is able to support a longer temporary job modification.

If...

The employee remains medically restricted after two (2) months of modified duty, *then...*

The supervisor and the local RTW representative refers the employee to RTW coordinator so that a long-term solution may be considered.

Long-Term Modifications and/or Reassignment

If...

An employee has medical restrictions that are indefinite or long-term, *then...*

The employee is referred to RTW coordinator and the RTW committee for further consideration

The RTW committee will work in conjunction with the employee's treating healthcare provider to gather additional information regarding the employee's current functioning and recommendations for long-term accommodations.

If...

The employee is able to continue in his or her current assignment and do the essential functions of the job with modifications, *then...*

The RTW coordinator will discuss the potential job accommodation with the supervisor and site leadership, as appropriate. If a job accommodation can be agreed upon based on the employee's functional capacity, the RTW committee will approve the request. Long-term accommodations may be reviewed annually or more frequently, as necessary by the RTW committee.

If...

The employee cannot be accommodated in his or her current position, *then...*

The RTW coordinator may recommend that, if benefits have already been approved, they be continued while a job search is conducted for a modified assignment. A job search will be conducted for up to 60 days.

If...

The employee can be placed in a position with job accommodations or cannot be accommodated after a job search of 60 days, *then...*

The supervisor and the local RTW representative will arrange for the employee to be reassigned to another position with job accommodations. If that is not possible, the employee's employment may be terminated.

Declining an Offer of a TWA

If an employee is actively at work and declines a TWA designed to fit the employee's particular functional capacity and determined to be medically safe to engage in, the employee will be placed on an unpaid leave of absence that cannot exceed six (6) months.

If an employee is receiving short-term disability (STD) benefits and the employee is offered appropriate transitional work and does not return to work, the employee may no longer be eligible for STD benefits and/or the employee may be terminated.

If there is a difference of opinion between the company's RTW committee and the treating healthcare provider, a referral for a functional capacity exam, fitness-for-duty evaluation, or independent medical exam may be necessary to resolve the difference in perspectives. The costs of such exams may be the responsibility of the employee or ABC Company, depending on the nature of the issue.

During the period of time where medically approved transitional work has been offered but the employee has yet to accept that offer, the employee will be placed on an unpaid leave of absence for up to six (6) months and will potentially forfeit short-term disability and/or workers' compensation benefits.

Benefits and Job Protection

Employees are protected against job loss for up to 12 weeks, if eligible under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and they have not used up their allotment in the preceding 12 months. During TWAs, only the time not worked will be counted against the FMLA allotment.

If an employee's absence extends beyond six (6) months and his or her former position is no longer available, efforts will be made to assist the employee in finding a vacant position that is consistent with the employee's job qualifications.

In those cases involving workers' compensation (WC), state requirements will vary, and it will be important for employees to speak with their supervisor, HR representative, and/or the WC representative to fully understand their benefits.

Additional Resources

Company Absence Reporting Line: XXX.XXX.XXXX

HR Service Center: XXX.XXX.XXXX *(for all questions regarding time reporting, pay, and/or benefits)*

RTW Coordinator: XXX.XXX.XXXX

Safety and Health: XXX.XXX.XXXX

Employee Assistance Program: XXX.XXX.XXXX

Policy approved by:

Date: