

Making Sense: Work in the Time of COVID-19



A Guide to How COVID-19 Is Affecting Work and What Comes Next

Presented by



COVID-19's Impact on Jobs and the Ways We Work

Unlike common illnesses like the flu or colds, COVID-19 is different because people do not have a natural immunity to, nor an ability to fight easily, the disease. As a result, people who get COVID-19 tend to get sicker, and for longer than other illnesses they might experience. Because there is currently no vaccine for COVID-19, the best way to fight it is through [mitigation](#) measures, like social distancing. Social distancing involves things like staying at least six feet away from other people, as well as staying at home as much as possible, and avoiding being around groups of people.

To promote social distancing, federal, state, and local governments have taken steps to reduce the chances of people gathering. This means many businesses considered as non-essential, such as those that don't provide food, medicine, or critical services, are required to close.

The result of these closures is that many employees have lost their jobs, either temporarily, through [furloughs](#), or permanently, through [layoffs](#). Most people who lose their jobs can receive unemployment benefits from the government. This means they



get money to help pay basic expenses, like rent, house payments, and food. While recipients don't make as much money as they did when they were working, they will get some help.

Some businesses that are considered non-essential are still able to continue to operate because employees can work from their homes. These workers continue to do their jobs and communicate and collaborate with others using tools

such as video conferencing services, email, cell phones, and applications. Known as [remote work](#), businesses that can take advantage of this approach include those based in offices, such as insurance companies, engineering firms, advertising agencies, technology providers, online retailers, real estate offices, and many others. You may experience something like remote work if you are doing school online.

Even though remote work is an option for many, there are businesses like those involving travel, vacation rentals, or events planning, such as for graduations or weddings, that still may need to let employees go because of a decline in demand related to COVID-19.

How Government Is Responding

In response to COVID-19, the U.S. Congress passed the [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security \(CARES\) Act](#). At \$2.2 trillion, it is the largest economic relief package in U.S. history. The goal of the CARES Act is to help businesses and individuals impacted by the economic downturn caused by COVID-19.

Part of the CARES Act is the [Paycheck Protection Program \(PPP\)](#). This program is offered through the [Small Business Administration](#) and provides loans to small businesses to continue paying employees for up to eight weeks. If companies using this program meet specific requirements, the loans may be forgiven, meaning

employers won't need to pay the loans back to the government. Additionally, the government is providing one-time checks to individuals who qualify, as well as enhancing unemployment benefits in response to COVID-19.



Help Still Wanted

With COVID-19, the United States is seeing a record number of Americans losing their jobs. However, the hope is most people will be out of work only for a short amount of time and that in a few months many of those who lost their jobs will be able to go back to work. In the meantime, some industries are still hiring during this current economic downturn.



Not surprisingly, industries that have seen a surge in demand in response to the pandemic are hiring. The most obvious is the health care industry. Doctors, physician assistants, nurses, medical technicians, first responders, lab technicians, and others with medical or health care backgrounds, are being recruited, especially in those communities with the most COVID-19 cases. In response to this need, some medical schools have moved up their graduation dates to ensure new doctors and other medical professionals can practice as soon as possible. Hospitals are also reaching out to retired nurses, lab technicians, respiratory therapists, and radiologists for help. Additionally, financial incentives are

available to medical professionals willing to come from areas of the country not as hard-hit by COVID-19 to those dealing with large numbers of cases.

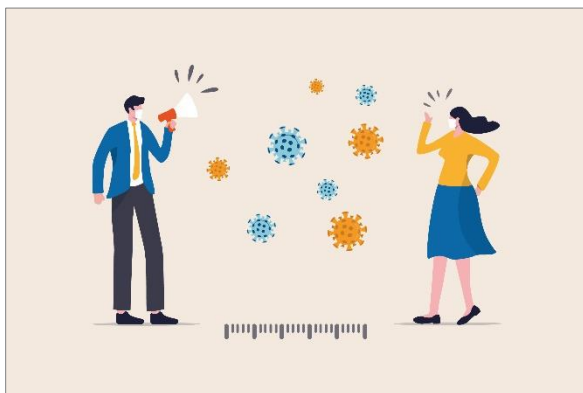
The health care industry isn't the only one hiring. Businesses that are considered "essential," such as grocery stores, are adding stockers, checkers, and warehouse workers. Online retailers, shipping, and delivery companies are also increasing their payrolls in response to demand being driven by the fact most Americans are being encouraged to stay at home and are more dependent on products delivered to their front doors. Technology companies are also recruiting, especially those that provide platforms used for remote work, as well as online learning businesses that help deliver school curriculum to homes.



Additionally, there are other professions, such as those in the skilled trades (electricians, plumbers, auto mechanics, etc.) who can continue working because their jobs are also considered essential.

Going Back to Work

So, when can everybody go back to work? It's a complicated question. First, the most effective cure for a virus like COVID-19 is a vaccine. Currently, the most optimistic timeframe for a vaccine being available is sometime in 2021.



It's hard to imagine so many people not having jobs and staying in their homes for a year or more while a vaccine is in process. Not just because of the financial challenges this presents, but because people are social beings, and it could be difficult for most to practice self-isolation for so long.

Elected officials and public health experts are exploring the best way forward, which may mean coming up with ideas for people to go back to work before there is a vaccine.

If this approach is taken, it could mean a "new normal" for some time. For instance, once current cases of COVID-19 decline substantially and testing is more widely available, some people may go back to work with the understanding they continue social distancing, regular handwashing, and the use of masks and other protection

when appropriate. While it may take time for a vaccine to be developed, effective treatments, such as medicines that won't cure COVID-19 but will lessen the severity of its symptoms, may be considered. These are a few ideas being considered by officials and experts to deal with COVID-19 in the coming months. Whatever steps occur, jobs may come back gradually and not fully recover for a long time.

What Comes Next?

COVID-19 will eventually be defeated. But it won't happen overnight. In the meantime, many young people are graduating from high school or college or planning to do so soon. What does this mean for them?

In the near term, it could be a challenging time. New graduates may struggle to find a job over the next several months. If they are looking to start college or some sort of training after completing high school, there's a good chance it will have to be done online, at least initially. For those planning for college or careers beyond 2021, the impact of COVID-19 may not be as much of a concern.



Before that time, there may be an opportunity to make the best of staying at home. Essential skills, and even certifications, can be earned online for limited cost in the areas of coding, analytics, programming, project management, marketing, web development, and others. Just because you are staying home doesn't mean you need to stand still. Ultimately our lives will get back to normal, but it will take some time. In the interim, this could be a unique opportunity to learn.