

# Return to Work

## SURVEY RESULTS



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135 Total Responses

April 13, 2021

# Return to Work

As the U.S. and Europe accelerate the rollout of COVID vaccine programs, businesses are starting to plan for reopening of their workplaces and bringing colleagues back together again. However, it is clear that for many companies there will be no return to the world of office work as we knew it before the arrival of the pandemic.

The following survey results from HR Policy Association and its global partner Brussels European Employee Relations Group (BEERG) aim to help member companies with benchmarking what other companies are considering regarding reopening workplaces and vaccine policies.

HR Policy Association is the lead organization representing chief human resource officers of major employers. The Association consists of more than 390 of the largest corporations doing business in the United States and globally, and these employers are represented in the organization by their most senior human resource executive. Collectively, their companies employ more than 11 million employees in the United States, over nine percent of the private sector workforce, and 20 million employees worldwide. They have a combined market capitalization of more than \$8 trillion. These senior corporate officers participate in the Association because of their commitment to improving the direction of human resource policy. Their objective is to use the combined power of the membership to act

as a positive influence to better public policy, the HR marketplace, and the human resource profession. For more information visit <https://www.hrpolicy.org>.

The Brussels European Employee Relations Group is a Brussels-based networking and consultancy group which focuses on European and global labor relations issues. Established in 2002 BEERG now has more than 80 major transnational corporations in membership and is recognized as one of the leading employer groups specializing in European Works Councils. The BEERG team has been involved in negotiating, or renegotiating, over 100 EWC agreements over the past 20 years. For more information visit <https://beerg.com/>.



Respondent breakdown: 31% of respondents are from the industrials sector, 18% are health care companies, 16% from the consumer discretionary industry, 8% from the financial sector, 7% are information technology companies, 5% from the materials industry, 5% consumer staples, 4% are real estate companies, 3% are energy companies, 2% communication services, and 1% from the utilities industry.

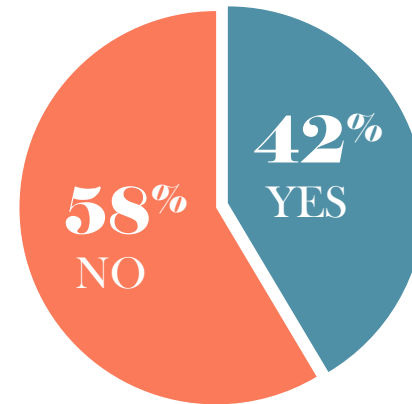
# Have you set a date to reopen your workplace?

For those companies that have already reopened or have a reopening date set, informed decisions were made using data including vaccine availability, vaccination rate, regional COVID case rates, hospitalization rates, and CDC guidance. While some workplaces, depending on industry, have remained open throughout the pandemic, most have provided some flexibility for workers based on their role with the company. For example, a company's manufacturing locations may not have closed at all, but their HQ location is still working remotely.

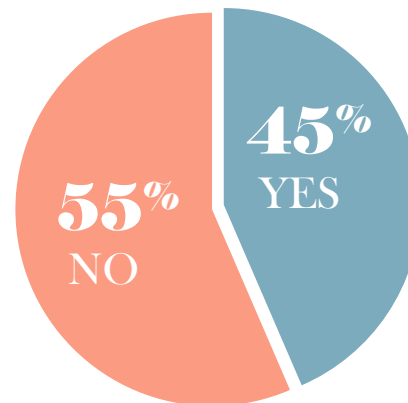
Some companies are considering soft openings or phased openings. Others timed their reopenings to coincide with dates such as the start of school, the end of summer, or the beginning of a new fiscal year.

Fewer BEERG respondents have set a reopening date (35%) as compared to HR Policy respondents (44%). Country-specific guidelines and developments will determine many BEERG respondents' reopening timelines.

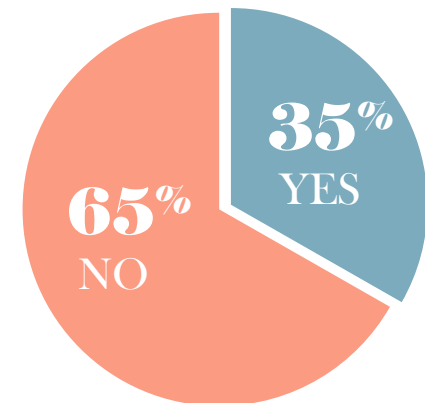
Answered: 135 Skipped: 0



COMBINED RESPONSES



HR POLICY RESPONSES



BEERG RESPONSES

# How are you rolling out your return-to-work plan?

A smaller number of companies are opening globally while most are opening region-by-region or country-by-country depending on local government guidance and area positivity rates to make decisions.

Some are rolling out their return-to-work plans on an even smaller scale, reopening offices on a location-by-location basis, taking local specifics into account.

Many locations in Asia have been back at the workplace for some time, while U.S. operations are often opening on a state-by-state basis. However, with most EU governments still requiring those who can do so to work from home, rising case numbers and limited vaccine availability is causing many EU offices to remain closed.

One company has implemented a global set of guidelines with variations to account for differences in local pandemic mandates.

Generally, BEERG respondents are more focused on opening country-by-country, while U.S. respondents are opening region-by-region or site-by-site.

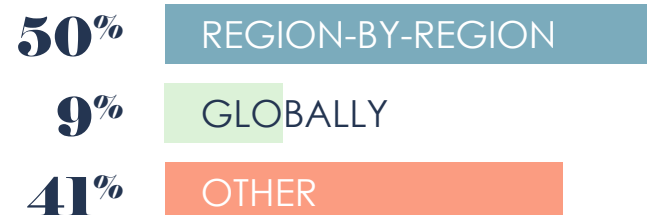
## COMBINED RESPONSES



## HR POLICY RESPONSES



## BEERG RESPONSES



# Where applicable, how will you model your return-to-work plan?

Return-to-work plans vary depending on the industry, location, and an employee's role. However, responses were consistent across both groups, with 91% of respondents planning to utilize a flexible or hybrid work model. A smaller percentage of companies (8% HR Policy, 9% BEERG) are planning a full return to the workplace, a pre-COVID model. None of the companies polled are planning a full remote work option for all employees.

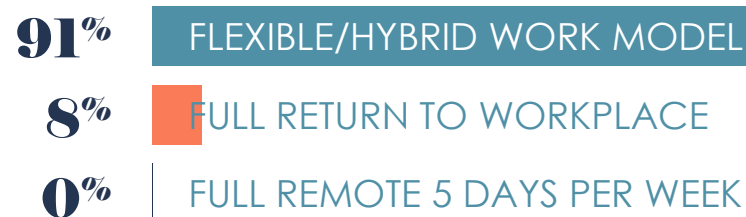
Some companies are updating their alternative work arrangement policies for employees to leverage as needed, creating on-site, hybrid, and fully virtual options. Others plan to adopt a more structured hybrid solution globally, providing a framework that designates certain days of the week as "office days" and the remaining days as "remote days" to ensure that employees are either in or out of the office on the same days. Others are using a phased approach: some employees will be primarily in-office, others will return 2–3 days per week, and some will be fully remote depending on their role.

See here for [respondents' plan specifics and supplemental comments](#).

Percentages are consistent across both groups of respondents. Totals do not add up to 100% because this question did not apply to all respondents.

Answered: 134 Skipped: 1

## COMBINED RESPONSES



# How will your departments return to the workplace?

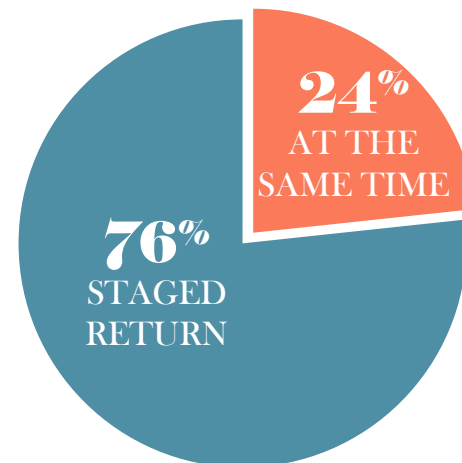
The majority of respondents (76%) indicated that they plan to implement a return to the workplace in stages, while 24% plan to return all at the same time. These numbers are consistent across both groups polled.

While employees deemed essential to company operations may have already returned to the workplace (if they left at all), other support workers will return more slowly and with increased hybrid schedules. Some companies have already assigned employees to teams that rotate in and out of the office and have plans to increase the percentage of employees allowed in the office gradually over time.

Other companies using the gradual approach are reopening offices more slowly, starting with a small percentage of workers who volunteer to be among the first to return. Some companies are returning in shifts, with anywhere from 10% to 50% of employees allowed in the workplace at one time.

A smaller percentage of respondents (24%) will return all at once. Unless there are capacity restrictions, these companies are planning to have employees at a given location return at the same time. If they have not already done so, many companies who prefer to return all at once are making plans to update seating arrangements and apply elevator restrictions to comply with social distancing requirements.

Answered: 132 Skipped: 3



COMBINED RESPONSES

# Are you requiring employees be vaccinated before returning to the workplace?

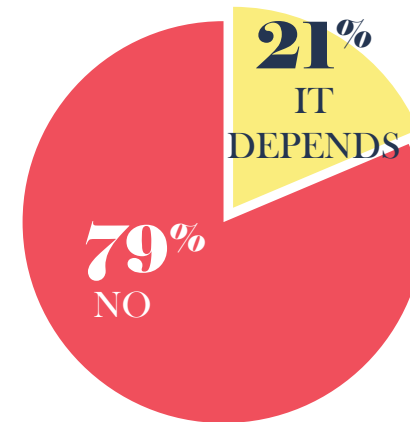
While this issue continues to evolve globally, the Federal government has deferred to U.S. private companies on whether they will require proof of vaccination.

Some companies say they will mandate proof of vaccination for employees only if required by local legislation. Other respondents say they would like to require vaccinations, but they are waiting to see how other organizations are handling the issue before they make a decision.

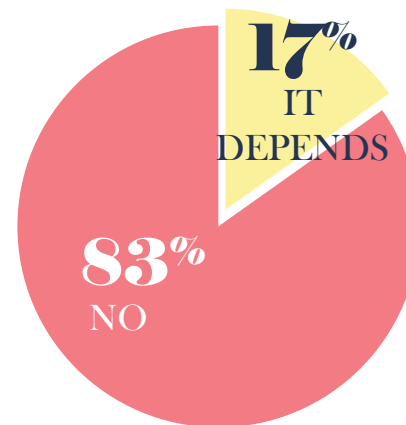
While no respondents are currently requiring all employees be vaccinated, many are strongly encouraging it through education and awareness campaigns. Some are requiring only employees with certain roles (*i.e.*, customer-facing or health care) be vaccinated.

Many companies will reassess the requirement once the vaccine becomes more readily available.

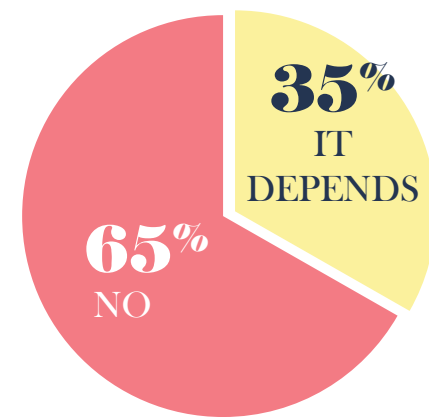
More HR Policy respondents say they will not require vaccination (83%) before returning to the workplace, while over one-third (35%) of BEERG respondents say it depends.



COMBINED RESPONSES



HR POLICY RESPONSES



BEERG RESPONSES

Answered: 135 Skipped: 0

# Will you have a separate area of the facility for those who have been vaccinated?

Only one company out of the 127 that answered this question indicated that they will have a separate area for employees who have been vaccinated. Percentages are consistent across both groups of respondents.

While several companies say they are not sure at this time whether they will provide a separate area in the future, most say they likely will not.

One company not currently mandating vaccines is also not planning to “exclude unvaccinated workers or otherwise treat them differently.”

Another company plans to require additional PPE, testing, and distancing for those who do not vaccinate. Locations where close quarters are necessary will be staffed by those who have already been vaccinated.

Answered: 128 Skipped: 7

## COMBINED RESPONSES

**99% NO**  
**1% YES**





# Do you have a formal policy for employees who decline to be vaccinated?

While few companies report having a formal policy in place (9% HR Policy, 0% BEERG), some say they are developing one currently or plan to have one in place soon.

Many companies are employing education and awareness campaigns to encourage employees to get the vaccine, but will not make it mandatory, and therefore will not create a formal policy.

One company's policy includes maintaining stricter PPE and testing requirements for those employees who decide not to be vaccinated.

Another company says the safety protocols currently in place apply to all employees, regardless of their vaccination status.

## HR POLICY RESPONSES

**91% NO**  
**9% YES**

## BEERG RESPONSES

**100% NO**  
**0% YES**

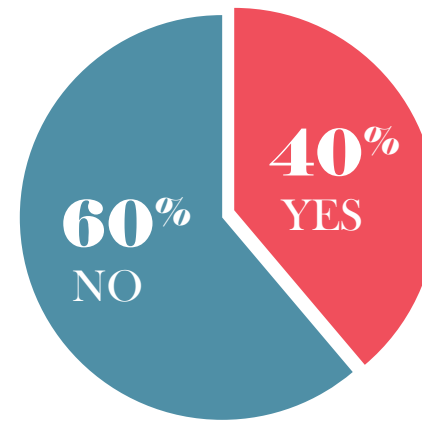
Answered: 131 Skipped: 4

# In the absence of vaccinations, would a “negative” COVID test result suffice?

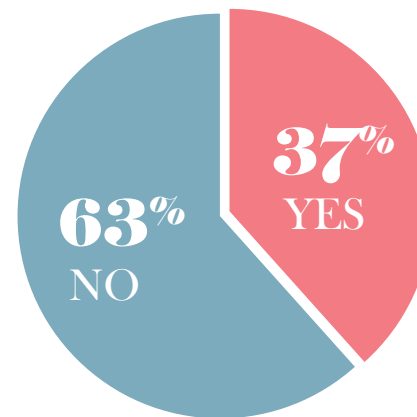
This question did not apply to all respondents as many are requiring neither vaccinations nor negative test results. For those that are, BEERG respondents are more likely to accept a negative test result (48%) in lieu of a vaccination than are their HR Policy counterparts (37%).

For some companies, a negative test result is required for returning to on-site work after traveling, or if the employee has previously tested positive. Others are requiring a weekly testing to access their U.S. facilities. At least one company will have rapid testing available as needed, but another says the tests are cost-prohibitive and therefore will not mandate them.

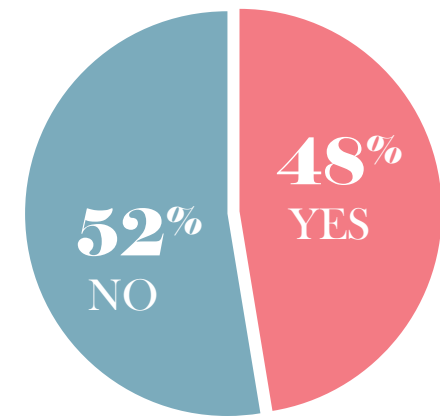
Answered: 105 Skipped: 30



COMBINED RESPONSES



HR POLICY RESPONSES



BEERG RESPONSES

# For employees who have been vaccinated, will you require proof of vaccination?

A majority of respondents (60%) say they will not require proof of vaccination upon return to the workplace while few (3%) will require proof of vaccination to return. While percentages are similar across both groups, BEERG respondents are slightly less likely to take employees at their word.

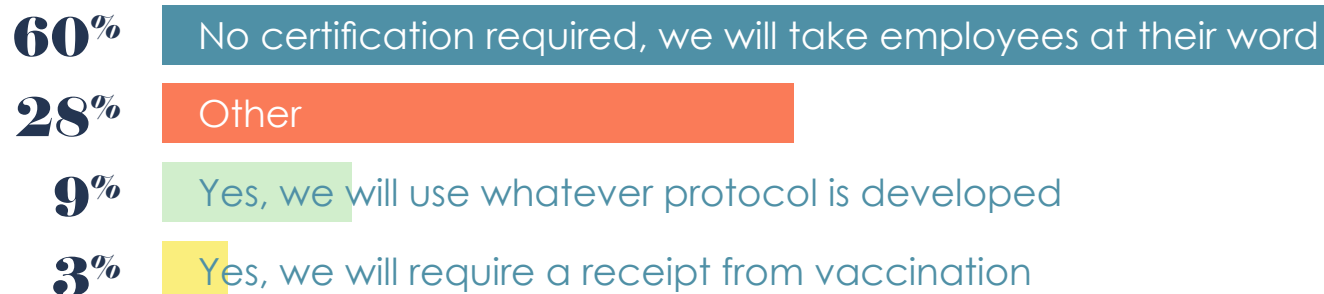
In many countries, local law prohibits employers from asking whether employees have been vaccinated. As a result, some companies are developing standards country-by-country. Realizing that they will likely need to capture vaccine data at least in the aggregate, one company is hoping to track employee vaccination globally, but still working out the details of how to validate. Others doubt usefulness of these statistics, as long-term vaccine efficacy has not yet been determined.

One company has set up a confidential tracking website so that they have visibility into vaccination rates on a site-by-site basis. Participation is encouraged but voluntary. Another company that is offering incentives to be vaccinated is encouraged with the number of employees who are self-reporting.

For companies offering paid time off, wellness credits, or incentives, a vaccine appointment card or other supporting documentation is required to receive the benefit. However, one respondent stated that this documentation will be neither retained nor required for returning to the office.

Answered: 131 Skipped: 4

## COMBINED RESPONSES



# How will you deal with visitors to your facilities?

While methods may vary depending on a company's industry, a majority of respondents (73%) say they will (or already do) provide a COVID screening questionnaire, a temperature check and/or mask requirements for visitors requesting access to their facilities.

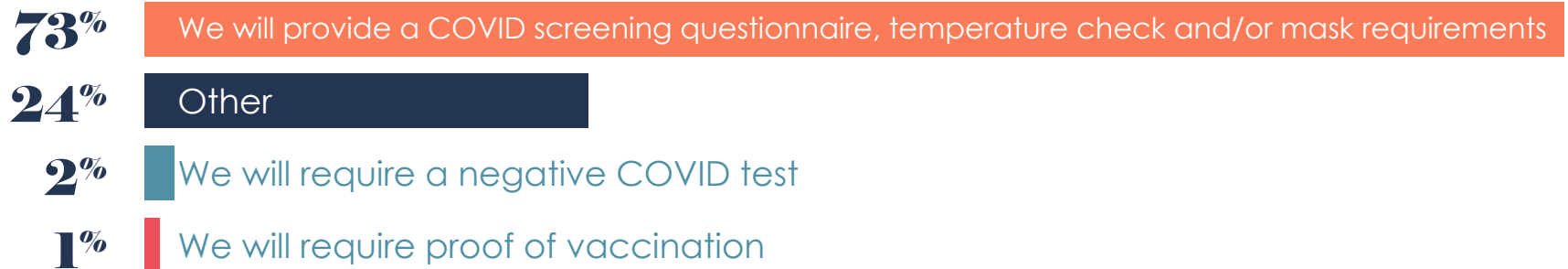
Many respondents who selected "Other" say they have yet to determine a protocol for visitors. When they return, one company has plans to continue following social distancing guidelines but will not be requiring any proof of vaccination from their customers/visitors. A few respondents say they are not currently allowing external visitors at their facilities at all.

Percentages are similar across both groups, with slightly more HR Policy respondents opting to provide a screening questionnaire and more BEERG respondents undecided.

Answered: 134 Skipped: 1



## COMBINED RESPONSES



# Once the vaccine is easily accessible to the general public and employees who want access are able to get vaccinated, will your company still require COVID safety protocols?

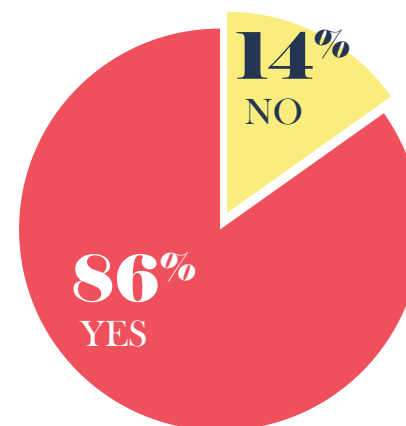
89% of HR Policy respondents and 79% of BEERG respondents (combined 86%) intend to keep current safety measures in place until they are deemed no longer necessary, relying on guidance from state, local, and medical authorities as well as recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control, World Health Organization, and OSHA. One company says that the extra safety protocols and layers of protections are “only helpful” and plans to keep them implemented until there is a decline in positivity rates.

Another company plans to “err on the side of caution,” citing uncertainty as to whether the vaccine prevents transmission of the virus, as well as not knowing who has/has not been vaccinated. For these reasons, it will continue to require current safety protocols for the foreseeable future.

A few companies say they will wait for “herd immunity,” and plan to closely monitor community transmission rates. One respondent says that they will likely retain their office layout changes allowing for social distancing.

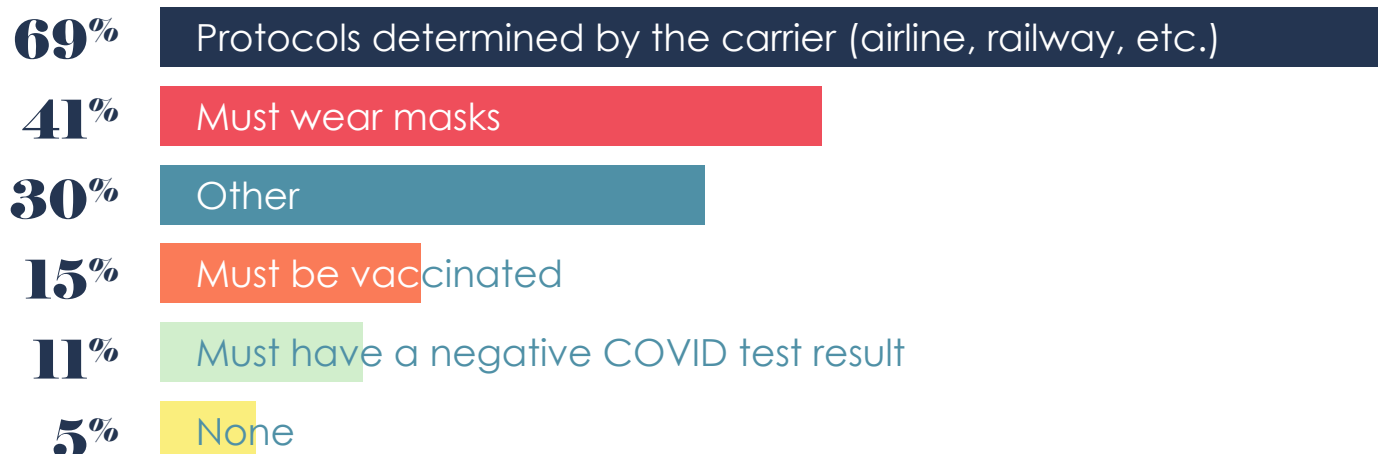
Answered: 124 Skipped: 11

COMBINED RESPONSES



# What protocols will you require employees who must travel on business to follow?

## COMBINED RESPONSES



A majority of respondents agree that employees who travel must abide by any protocols determined by the carrier. 41% will also require those traveling on business to wear masks. Many respondents who chose “Other” say they have yet to determine a formal business travel protocol. Percentages are similar across both groups polled, with slightly more HR Policy respondents planning to rely on protocols determined by the carrier in addition to other protocols.

Some state that employees will follow protocols established by departing and arriving locales, as well as those from the CDC and other applicable regulatory bodies.

One company who currently has a travel ban plans to follow CDC guidance once the ban is lifted. Another says their protocol is yet to be determined but will likely include vaccination or proof of a negative COVID test.

Answered: 131 Skipped: 4

# Do you plan to restrict attendance at conferences/meetings, whether internally or externally?

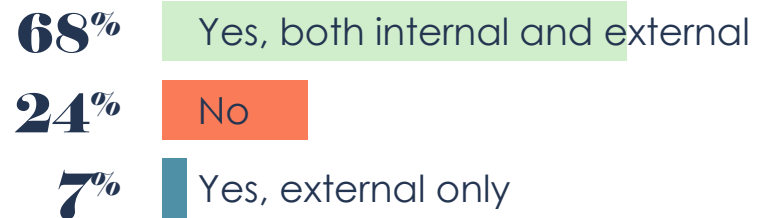
A majority of both groups (68% HR Policy, 86% BEERG) plan to restrict attendance at events both internally and externally. About one-quarter (24%) of HR Policy respondents and 14% of BEERG respondents say they do not plan to restrict event attendance at all.

While some companies are currently restricting attendance, they say this is likely to evolve as the situation changes. They plan to make decisions country-by-country based on local government regulations.

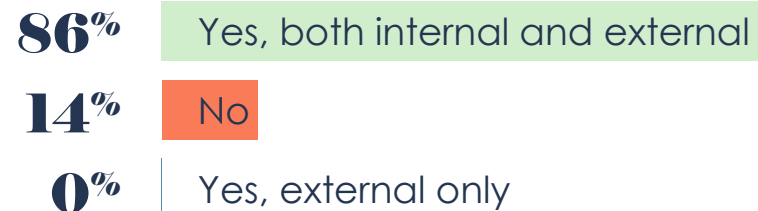
One company says event attendance will depend on location, travel requirements, and whether safety protocols can be maintained at the venue. Another company says all of their events will be virtual for the foreseeable future.

Answered: 124 Skipped: 11

## HR POLICY RESPONSES



## BEERG RESPONSES



# Do you have any additional comments?

“Our rollout of return to work will be “evolutionary” and highly dependent on local/federal health requirements, as well as the efficacy of vaccine rollout within local geographies.”

“The FDA’s timing on declaring the use of the vaccine for regular use (not emergency use authorization) will be an important factor. If the FDA does in the next 4-5 months, we may shift to mandate vaccines except for medical or other few exceptions.”

“The plan is evolving. Our PE owners have a large commercial real estate part of their business and are encouraging full return to office ASAP. We are negotiating our return and protocol with them.”

“This is a very fluid / evolving situation. Not one-size-fits all globally.”

“Our immediate focus is to implement virtual first way of working first. Many of the issues in the second part of the survey have not yet been considered since there are no plans for client/customer visits to our facilities and no plans for resuming business travel in the near future. Ask again in 6 to 9 months when vaccination campaigns progress.”

“We have been guided by the government to date but will be flexible to business needs as that falls away.”

“There is a recognition that there cannot be a one size fits all approach. Therefore the US and AU/NZ are returning to almost complete normality where as Europe and Asia are still some way off this stage.”

“Many variables still at play (variants, does virus carry, vaccine designation, availability, etc.) - requiring global market agility and adaptation.”

“Work in progress now - we are reviewing all the precautionary measures implemented, and ask ourselves about the right course of action to lighten some of those. Development of a decision matrix is critical, as well as how & when to communicate it to our workforce, so they understand the rationale behind and accept the withdrawn of some of the precautionary measures.”

“Any discussion about dismantling our COVID protocols will be driven by CDC guidance.”

“Our approach is rooted in science and CDC guidance.”

“We are administering the vaccine on-site at all of our US based locations. To date, approximately 75% of the employees are working on site. The remaining all are scheduled to be back on site by mid June.”

“Building all policies, processes and systems (and setting employee expectations) with flexibility and agility in mind. We know that we will need to continue to change and evolve so setting this expectation in our design.”

“We test nearly 25,000 US employees every week. 7/10 who test positive are asymptomatic. And we have begun to find positives among those who are vaccinated (as our company physician points out, ‘The vaccine is not 100% effective.’)”

“There is a difficulty in requiring vaccination and risk of discrimination. All must be done sensitively.”