



Working During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Guide for Informed Decision-Making

By Cindy Thomas

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, day and employment service providers have had to quickly determine how best to provide supports for people they serve. For many this means transitioning to services and supports that can be provided remotely. This brief is one in a series developed to help community providers continue to provide services to those who are currently working, seeking employment, or engaged in community-based day supports.

During this time, we are all learning how to best support the people we serve. We welcome your feedback and ideas as we all work together to provide services that help people to continue to work towards their goals while staying safe and healthy.

ICI COVID-19 resources: covid19.communityinclusion.org

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed how we think about going to work. While many of us are able to work remotely, many businesses and job functions continue to be essential and must be performed in person. Some people with disabilities are currently working in essential roles and businesses. Others are job seeking and eager to go to work.

Making the decision to continue working or to get a new job during this time requires thoughtful considerations of both the benefits and risks. This guide assists employment service providers in helping people they support determine whether or not they should work, considering both the benefits and the risks. It is not the employment provider's decision, but one that should be made by the individual in consultation with those they trust and who support them.

Summary of factors to be considered by individuals in making an informed choice about going to work:

- ▶ Risk to themselves and others
- ▶ Steps being taken by employer to protect workers
- ▶ Impact on employment situation if they choose not to work
- ▶ Need for wages from employment
- ▶ Level of supports needed by the individual and how they can be provided
- ▶ Availability of transportation
- ▶ Overall implications of working vs. not working for themselves and their job

1. Individual considerations

- ▶ [Is the person you are supporting at higher risk for COVID-19?](#)
- ▶ Are members of their household at higher risk and would they increase that risk by working outside of the home?
- ▶ Is the person you are supporting able to understand and follow the [CDC guidance to help prevent the spread of the virus, such as handwashing and social distancing](#)?

2. Work environment

- ▶ Has the business adopted policies and procedures to support worker safety?
- ▶ Have changes been made to the work environment to increase the safety of employees?
- ▶ Are employees provided with or can they bring personal protective equipment such as masks and gloves?
- ▶ If the individual is deciding whether to continue working, is the business allowing time off or the option to take a furlough should the person feel it is unsafe for them to work?

3. Support needed for success on the job

- ▶ Does the person you are working with need support on the job?
- ▶ If yes, can this support be provided remotely?

- ▶ If the support cannot be provided remotely, is the business allowing anyone on site who is not employed directly by the business? Is the provider agency able to provide in-person supports?
- ▶ Is the business willing to work remotely with the employment services provider to address any support needs?
- ▶ What self-management tools and technology are available to promote success and independence at work?
- ▶ Are there natural supports available in the workplace to support success and to help monitor employee safety?

4. Transportation

- ▶ What are the transportation options to get to and from work?
- ▶ Does transportation pose additional risk? Is the transportation provider taking necessary precautions? Are there other options that might be available during this time?

5. Financial considerations

- ▶ Does the individual and/or their household have pressing financial needs?
- ▶ If there are benefit considerations, is access to benefits counseling available?

6. Other supports and resources

- ▶ If the person being supported typically accesses other supports from family, residential staff, and/or a therapist, are these resources available at this time?
- ▶ If not, are alternative supports needed to support the individual's well-being?
- ▶ Does the individual have a health care provider they can consult if they have questions about COVID-19?

Importance of Job Match

If the person being supported is seeking a new job, this is a particularly important time to consider the quality of the job match. The range of opportunities currently available is more limited and it can be tempting to take whatever job is available. At the same time, on-site support may be limited or not available, managers and supervisors may be stressed with less time to devote to training and onboarding, and the demands of the job may be compounded by high vacancy rates.

Conclusion

Working during this pandemic comes with risks but also can provide opportunities. Employment providers can play an important role in supporting the individuals they work with and others who support them to make an informed decision about work.

Editorial assistance for this publication provided by Mary DiBiase and Anya Weber.

This COVID-19 publication series was produced by the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston and funded by the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS) as part of the DDS Employment First initiative.

For more information: David Hoff | david.hoff@umb.edu



www.communityinclusion.org | www.employmentfirstMA.org