

CEP Magazine – January 2021 Returning to business travel: Mitigating risk for your employees

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The disruption of recent months has forced companies around the world to rewrite business plans and alter operations. Perhaps most significant has been the unprecedented migration of workers to virtual, work-from-home environments, necessitated by travel restrictions and the widespread lockdown of citizens. But as the rules curtailing people's movement are eased, much has been written and said about the best way to get people back to their offices.

One topic not discussed as much as it should be is the return of business travel. While the number of flight bookings remain generally low, there has been a recent uptick in some locations. In October 2020, for example, more than a million passengers passed through the Transportation Security Administration checkpoints for the first time since the lockdown began.^[1] Companies, therefore, would be well advised to start preparing.

Update your travel policy

In the past, travel policy reviews commonly took place once a quarter, or even once a year. Today, employers need processes that enable a regular review and update of their travel policy. While doing so, companies must understand the need to protect both the well-being of employees and their own corporate reputation. For example, employers may insist all employees use masks or facial coverings for air and rail travel regardless of whether it is mandated by the operator or relevant authority. At the same time, a company could allow a business traveler to book an airline that employs an open middle seat policy even if it's not the lowest fare available on a particular route. In the policy update, employers could also stress the need to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) best practice guidance for overnight hotel stays and dining out while traveling.

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