



Office of Inspector General

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

Results of the OIG Survey on Returning to the Workplace

May 27, 2021

Report 21-O-06

Vision Statement

We are agents of positive change striving for continuous improvements in our agency's management and program operations, as well as within the Office of Inspector General.

Statement of Principles

We will:

Work with the Commission and the Congress to improve program management.

Maximize the positive impact and ensure the independence and objectivity of our audits, investigations, and other reviews.

Use our investigations and other reviews to increase government integrity and recommend improved systems to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse.

Be innovative, question existing procedures, and suggest improvements.

Build relationships with program managers based on a shared commitment to improving program operations and effectiveness.

Strive to continually improve the quality and usefulness of our products.

Work together to address government-wide issues.



May 27, 2021

TO: Robert S. Adler, Acting Chairman
Elliot F. Kaye, Commissioner
Dana Baiocco, Commissioner
Peter A. Feldman, Commissioner

FROM: Christopher W. Dentel, Inspector General

SUBJECT: Results of the OIG Survey on Returning to the Workplace

I am pleased to present the results of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) survey on returning to the workplace after fulltime telework during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey covered the topics of vaccines, desired safety measures upon return to regular duty stations (RDS), experiences of employees who have already returned to their RDS, communications from management regarding a return to RDS, and preferred work arrangements after mandatory fulltime telework.

A clear majority of employees expressed an intention to become vaccinated. Effective ventilation was the most important safety measure chosen by employees. Notification about potential COVID-19 exposure and a policy protecting employees who reported safety concerns rounded out the top three. Over a third of all employees were unsure if they would feel comfortable returning to their RDS. However, once we analyzed these responses based on whether the respondent had experience returning to their RDS, a higher number of employees who had returned stated they would be comfortable at their RDS.

Separately, staff indicated that they would prefer more communications from management about a potential return to work. Twice as many employees expressed concerns that communications were not frequent enough when compared to responses to the same question last fall. Telework continues to receive strong support. We note that management has recently released additional guidance on the return to work, and has announced a new trial telework policy to begin this fall that will allow staff to telework up to four days per week.

I want to thank CPSC staff for participating in this survey.

Table of Contents

Background	2
Results in Brief.....	3
Vaccine	3
Planning to Return to Work Safely	3
Experiences Returning to Work Safely	4
Communications.....	6
Telework.....	7
Objectives, Scope, and Methodology	9
APPENDIX A: Additional Survey Questions.....	10

Background

Part of the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) oversight mission is to recommend policies to promote efficient and effective operations. With that in mind, on February 23, 2021, the U. S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) OIG launched a survey to gauge employee concerns about a potential return to their regularly assigned duty stations (RDS) after teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the time of this survey, some staff had reported already returning to their RDS and some individual offices reported holding staff meetings to discuss returning staff to their RDS. In the world at large, infection rates were dropping and vaccination rates were ramping up. Therefore, the OIG wanted to understand employee concerns regarding vaccinations, returning to their RDS, messaging from management regarding returning to a RDS, and views on employee schedule preferences once the agency returns to more in-person work.

This survey asked employees to respond to questions related to the following topics:

- Vaccines
- Desired safety measures upon return to RDS
- Experiences of employees that have already returned to their RDS
- Communications from management regarding a return to RDS
- Preferred work arrangements post mandatory fulltime telework

This survey was sent to 529 unique email addresses and 335 people responded during the survey window of February 23, 2021, to March 5, 2021.

Table 1. Response Rates by CPSC Employee Location

	Number of Email Addresses	Responses	Response Rate
Headquarters	311	217	69.8%
Lab (5RP)	98	65	66.4%
Field/Port	120	53	44.2%
Total	529	335	63.4%

Source: OIG analysis of CPSC data and response information

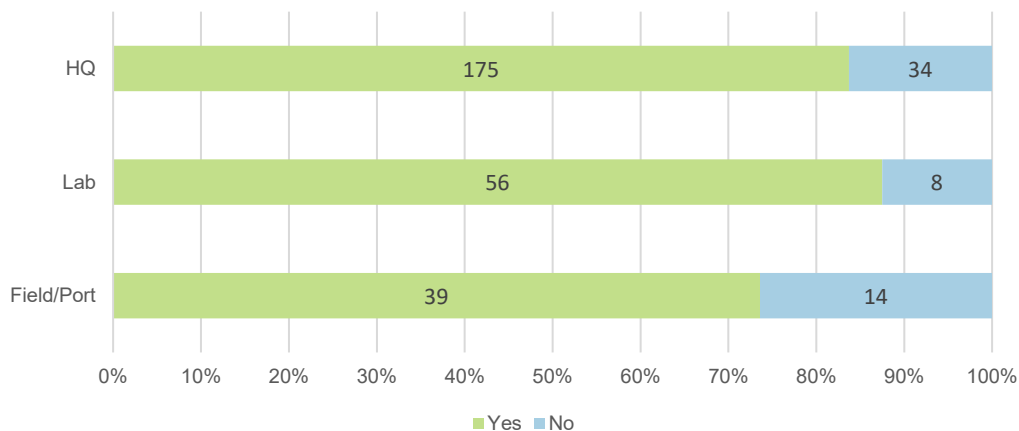
The response rate of this survey was slightly higher than the 59 percent overall response rate to the OIG September 2020 survey on the transition to fulltime telework. While the response rate among the employees at headquarters increased by over ten percent, the response rate for lab employees dropped by nearly three percent, and fell by just over ten percent for field/port employees. We surmise the change in response rates for headquarters and field/port employees reflects their experiences over the course of the last six months; many field/port staff have returned to their RDS while headquarters staff continue to work almost exclusively from home.

Results in Brief

Vaccine

Employees overwhelmingly indicated that they intend to get the vaccine when they have the opportunity. Over 73 percent of field/port employees, 83 percent of lab employees, and 87 percent of headquarters employees intend to be vaccinated.

Chart 1. Vaccine Receptiveness



Unsurprisingly, given the above, the employees surveyed voiced consistently high support when asked if the CPSC should offer administrative leave to receive the vaccine (80.9 percent), and if the CPSC should make the vaccine available to employees (88.7 percent).¹

Planning to Return to Work Safely

We surveyed employees about a wide variety of measures they might want to see implemented before they returned to work. Specifically, we asked about ten worksite safety changes and four policy changes that the CPSC could institute to help employees feel safe in the workplace. Below are the five most requested items.

Table 2. Worksite Safety Requirements

Item	Number ²
Improved ventilation	278
Clear standards for a return to the worksite	267
COVID-19 exposure notification policy	263
Policies for reporting workplace safety concerns	251
Disinfection of workplace surfaces	248

Source: OIG analysis of response information

¹ Subsequent to the survey, the CPSC began offering employees administrative leave to obtain vaccinations.

² Represents respondents who indicated that this requirement is essential.

Consistent with the different workplace environments, field/port staff included the availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) and an anti-retaliation policy for raising concerns about COVID-19 safety in their top five “must haves.” While headquarters staff rated the availability of hand sanitizer in their top five requirements. The list in Table 2 exactly matches the preferences of lab staff.

Additionally, we asked if employees would feel safe returning to their regular worksites if the CPSC says it is safe to do so.

Table 3. Employee Comfort with Returning to RDS by Location

	Total	HQ	Lab	Field/Port
Yes	32.4%	23.9%	35.9%	63.3%
No	31.1%	40.0%	15.6%	14.3%
Unsure	36.5%	36.1%	48.4%	22.4%

Source: OIG analysis of response information

These responses indicate a relatively high degree of uncertainty about returning among staff. This was most prominent among headquarters’ staff, where nearly half of those surveyed had not returned to their RDS even once. A higher proportion of field/port staff have already returned to their RDS; therefore, we hypothesize that safety concerns regarding a return to RDS may dissipate once employees actually return to their RDS and become familiar with the safety changes implemented.

Experiences Returning to Work Safely

When surveyed, 184 employees reported that they had returned to their RDS. The table below shows the number of times that respondents have returned to their RDS.

Table 4. Return to RDS by Location

Frequency of Return	Total	HQ	Lab	Field/Port
Once	62	56	6	0
Twice	56	42	13	1
Several Times	25	10	10	5
Regular recurring basis	41	3	15	23

Source: OIG analysis of response information

As was expected, field/port staff were the most likely to report returning to work on a recurring basis. On the other hand, most headquarters staff reported returning to the office only once or twice. Almost everyone, 87 percent, indicated that the return to their RDS was voluntary.

Employees who had already returned to their RDS were asked whether they observed the safety precautions in the table below.

Table 5. Workplace Safety Precautions Observed

	HQ	Lab	Field/Port
Number of Respondents	111	44	34
Personal Protective Equipment	17%	77%	69%
Health Prescreen	50%	84%	45%
Temperature Station	30%	82%	30%
Disinfection	31%	64%	31%
Sanitizer	63%	95%	24%
Cleaning Supplies	21%	45%	38%
Building Capacity	74%	14%	24%
Rules of Behavior Signs	45%	41%	24%

Source: OIG analysis of response information

Separately, we inquired about respondents' observations related to mask wearing compliance while at the RDS.

Table 6. Masking Compliance

	Total	HQ	Lab	Field/Port
Everyone I observed was wearing a mask	77.7%	79.2%	74.4%	76.9%
Some people I observed were wearing masks	17.8%	15.8%	25.6%	7.7%
No one I observed was wearing a mask	4.5%	5.0%	0.0%	15.4%

Source: OIG analysis of response information

Overall, employees in the lab reported the greatest access to safety precautions and the highest compliance with mask requirements. Most employees who had returned to their RDS stated they felt comfortable with the experience, and the highest rate of comfort was reported by field/port employees.

Interestingly, we note that staff who have returned to their RDS on a more regular basis appear to be more comfortable with the idea of returning to work than those who have not returned. This suggests that as staff gain experience at their regular worksites they may become more comfortable. This theory is supported by comparing the answers based on whether the respondent had experience returning to the RDS.

Table 7. Comfort Being On-site at RDS

Those with experience being on-site				
	Total	HQ	Lab	Field/Port
Yes, I was comfortable	41.1%	29.5%	38.6%	82.4%
No, I was not comfortable	25.3%	33.9%	11.4%	14.7%
I am unsure	33.7%	36.6%	50.0%	2.94%
Those without experience being on-site				
	Total	HQ	Lab	Field/Port
Yes, I am comfortable	19.5%	17.2%	30.0%	20.0%
No, I am not comfortable	39.8%	47.3%	25.0%	13.3%
I am unsure	40.6%	35.5%	45.0%	66.7%

Source: OIG analysis of response information

The biggest difference was the increase in comfort among returning field/port staff. They were more than four times more comfortable with being on-site than those who had no experience being on-site. Headquarters and lab staff who had been on-site were less likely to report discomfort with the experience. However, field/port staff were the only ones to also show a slight increase in discomfort after being back on-site.

Communications

Employees were asked how they rated the frequency of ongoing communications from agency management.

Table 8. Shift in Opinion about the Frequency of Information from Management

Office	September 2020		March 2021	
	Right Frequency	Not Enough	Right Frequency	Not Enough
Acting Chairman	229	41	222	82
Executive Director	246	27	228	77
Human Resources	199	70	196	108

Source: OIG analysis of prior and current responses

Compared to the responses from the same question last fall the number of “not frequent enough” responses increased significantly, and in some cases more than doubled from the previous fall. The number of “right frequency” responses fell slightly. The numbers of those reporting “too frequent communication” was negligible in both surveys.

Employees were additionally asked if they received an adequate amount of information from agency management.

Table 9. Shift in Opinion about the Amount of Information from Management

Office	September 2020		March 2021	
	Right Amount	Not Enough	Right Amount	Not Enough
Acting Chairman	213	37	226	80
Executive Director	222	34	233	73
Human Resources	172	78	197	109

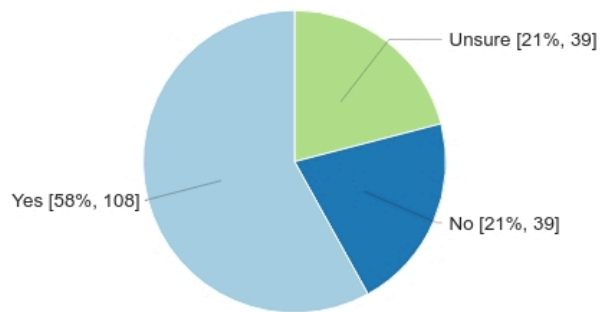
Source: OIG analysis of prior and current responses

Compared to the responses from the same question last fall the number of respondents choosing “not enough information” more than doubled regarding communication from the Acting Chairman and Executive Director and increased slightly regarding communication from Human Resources. The number of “right amount of information” responses also increased slightly, but fell as a percent in terms of overall responses. No one reported receiving too much information in the current survey and only three chose the “too much information option in the earlier survey.

We also asked if employees would prefer to have a date communicated to them and regularly updated about a potential return to their RDS.

Chart 2. Desire to Have a Return to Work Date Regularly Communicated

186 Responses

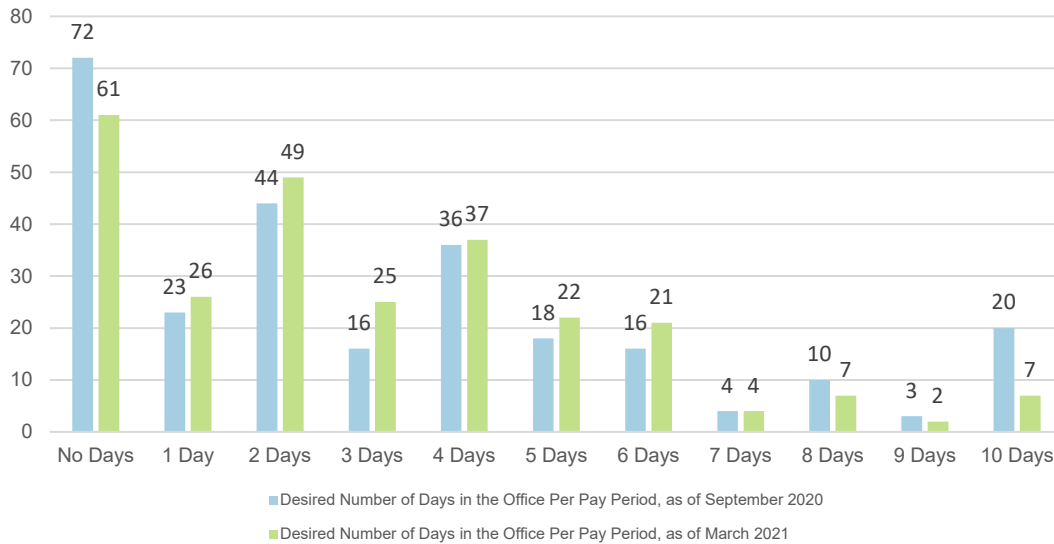


A clear majority of those surveyed indicated that they would prefer regular and updated communications as to when they may expect to return to work.

Telework

Employees were again asked what they felt would be the optimal number of days for them to be in the office per pay period to fulfill their job duties.

Chart 3. Change in the Desired Number of Days in the Office Per Pay Period Over Time



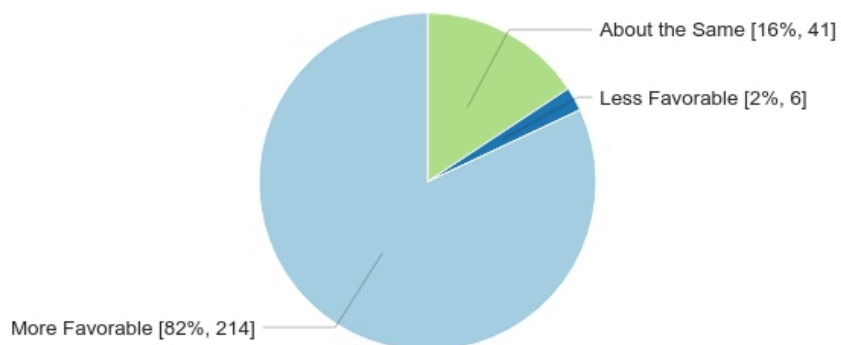
Source: OIG analysis of prior and current responses

Responses indicated that staff preferred fewer days in the office and more telework than they did last fall. The ideal number of days in the office dropped from 3.15 to 2.89 days per pay period.

Employees were asked if their opinion on teleworking had changed in the last six months in light of their experiences over the same time frame.

Chart 4. Changes in Opinion on Teleworking Over Time

261 Responses



Employees indicated that their attitude towards telework has improved over the time they have spent in mandatory fulltime telework status.

Finally, given the strong support for telework, we asked employees working at headquarters and the lab how they feel about hoteling in exchange for greater telework flexibility. Of the 261 employees who answered, approximately 60 percent supported exchanging dedicated work space for hoteling to gain additional telework options.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The objectives of this survey were to learn about employee concerns regarding vaccines, desired safety measures upon return to RDS, experiences of employees who had already returned to their RDS, communications from management related to a return to RDS, and preferred work arrangement after mandatory fulltime telework. We analyzed the results as a whole and, as appropriate, by RDS.

This survey was a special project undertaken by the OIG to learn about employee concerns regarding a return to their RDS. Special projects are narrowly scoped projects carried out to answer specific questions. As such, they are not necessarily listed in the OIG Annual Work Plan³ and are not performed in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards.

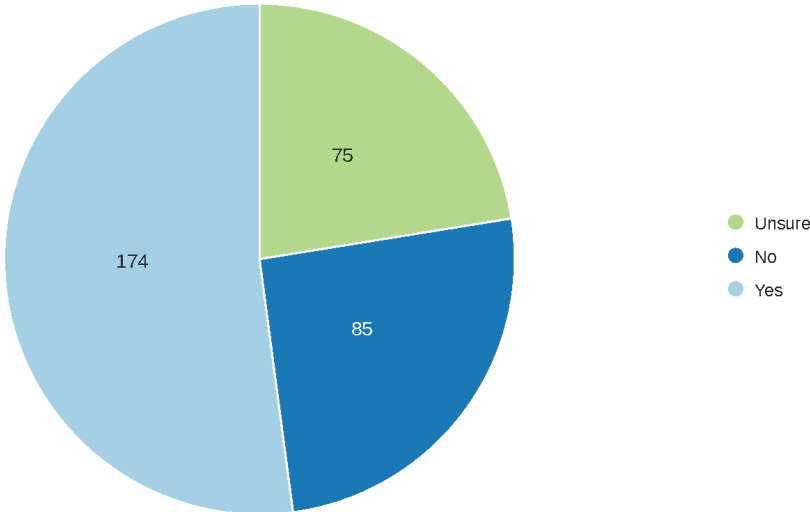
We conducted this survey from February 23, 2021, to March 5, 2021, using Qualtrics survey software. This survey was sent to 529 unique email addresses and we received 335 responses. The questions were developed by OIG staff. Questions were modified and assessed against best practices as described in professional survey literature. The survey was tested by OIG staff before it was distributed to agency employees. All survey respondents remain anonymous.

³ This project was an addition to the Fiscal Year 2021 OIG Annual Plan.

APPENDIX A: Additional Survey Questions

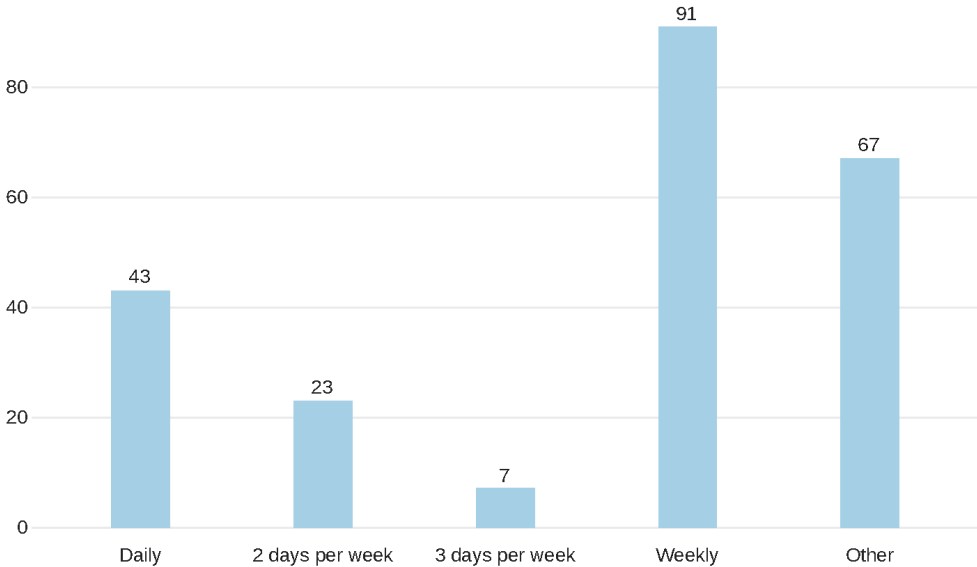
Do you think employees working onsite should be required to be tested for COVID-19 prior to returning to their regular work location?

334 Responses



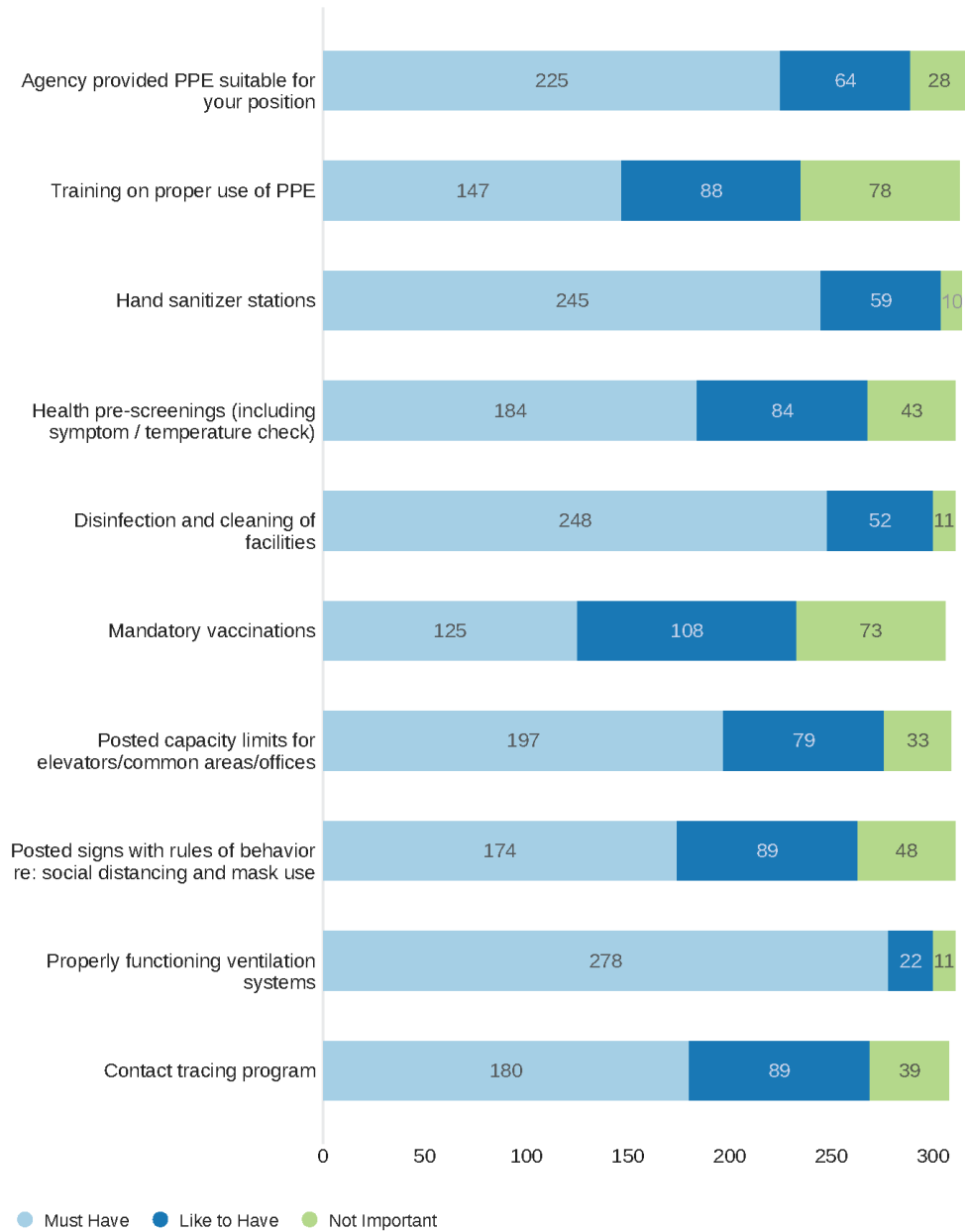
How frequently do you think employees should be tested?

231 Responses



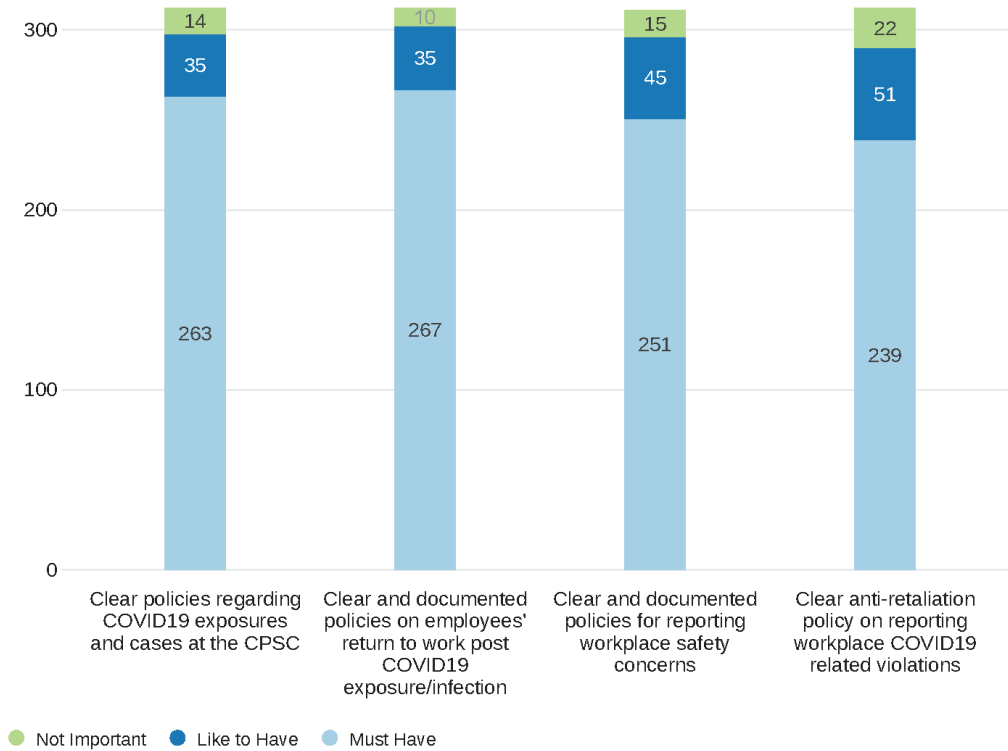
What do you require on-site to feel safe when you return to your regular work location?

317 Responses



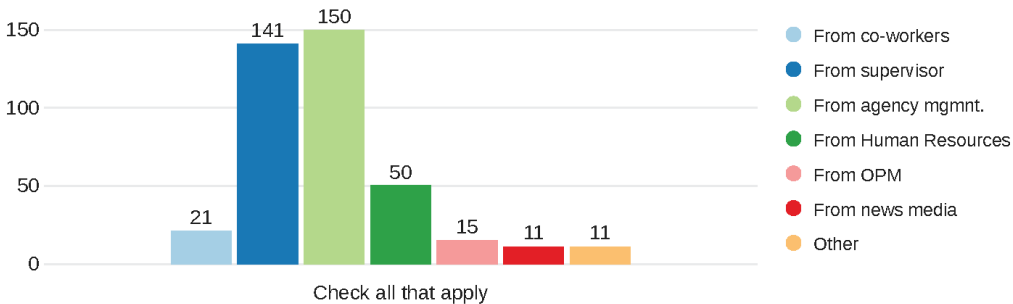
Which of the following policies would you like to have in place when you return to your regular work location?

314 Responses



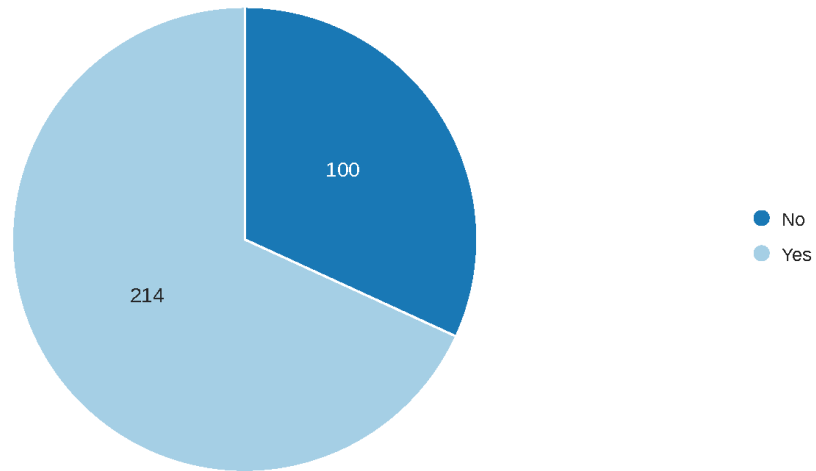
How was information regarding returning to your regular work location communicated to you?

202 Responses



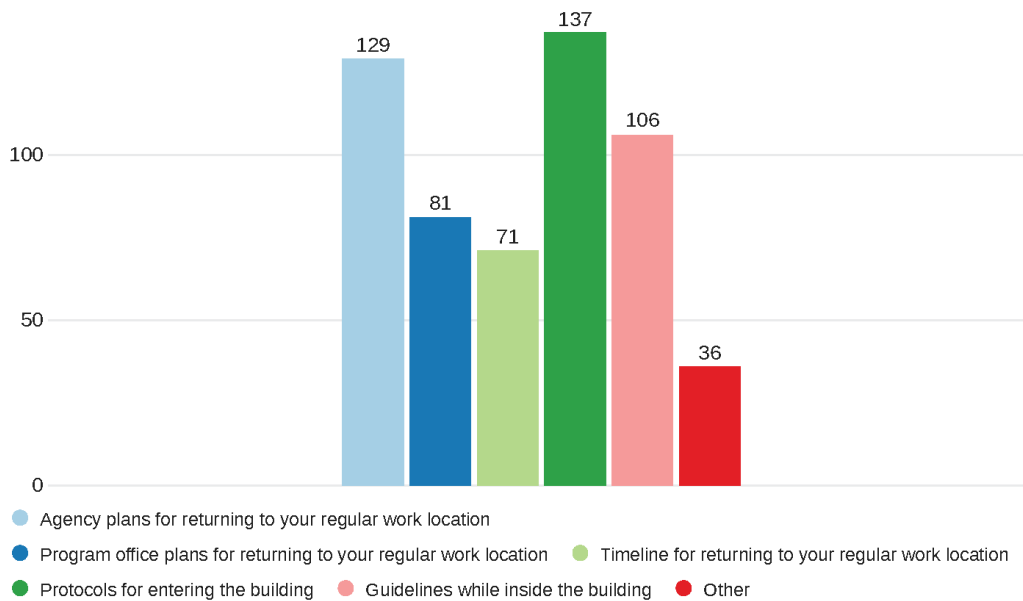
In the last six months has information been communicated to you regarding returning to your regular work location?

314 Responses



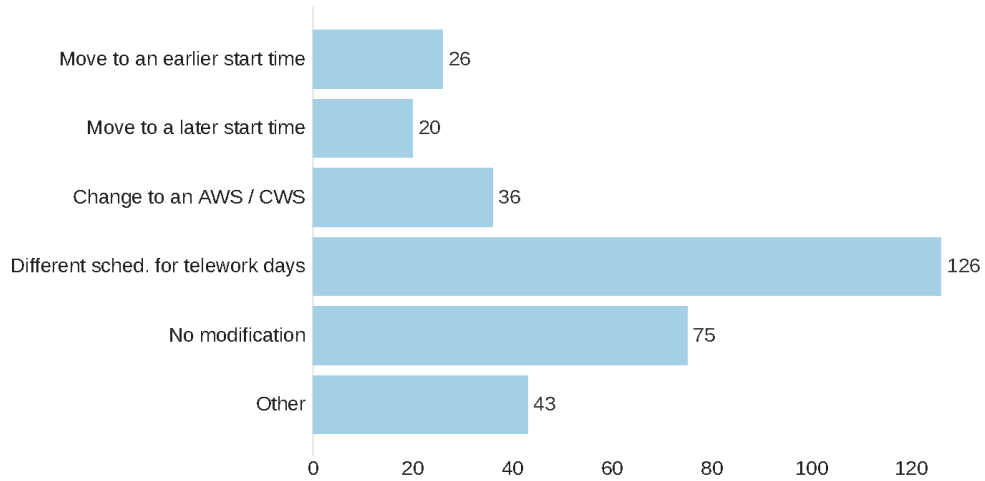
What information regarding returning to your regular work location was communicated to you?

197 Responses



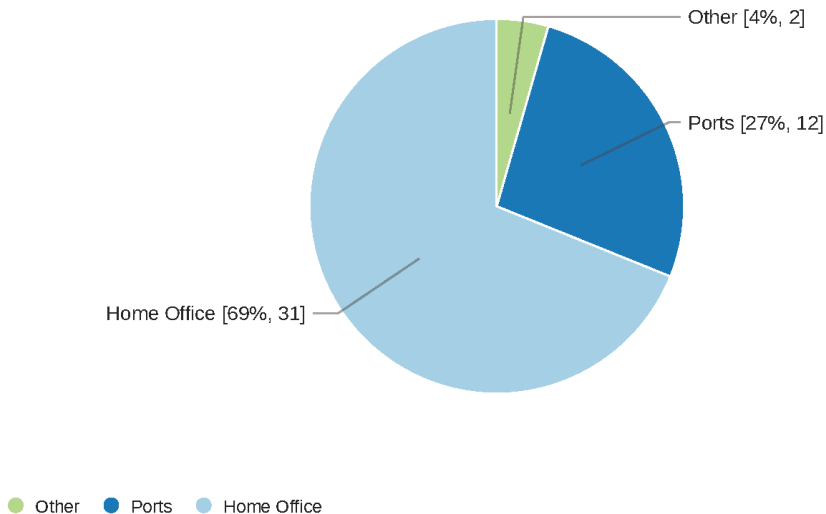
After the end of mandatory fulltime telework what schedule modifications would you make to your daily work schedule?

252 Responses



For Field and Port employees: Where is your regular work location?

45 Responses



CONTACT US

If you want to confidentially report or discuss any instance of fraud, waste, abuse, misconduct, or mismanagement involving the CPSC's programs and operations, please contact the CPSC Office of Inspector General.



Call:

301-504-7906
1-866-230-6229



On-line complaint form:

Click [here](#) for complaint form.
Click [here](#) for CPSC OIG Website.



Write:

Office of Inspector General
U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission
4330 East-West Highway, Room 702
Bethesda MD 20814