



India Inc to stick with WFH model till August-September

Synopsis

Many corporates will continue with the policy until August-September and then take a call depending on the infection rate, vaccination coverage and the possibility of a third wave.



Companies are trying to complete the vaccination of employees at the earliest despite the inoculation programme having slowed.

Despite a steady decline in fresh **Covid-19 cases**, **India Inc** is in no hurry to open up offices like last year with the deadly Covid-19 second wave impacting thousands of employees, amid a slowdown in the pace of vaccination.

ITC, Maruti Suzuki, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Motors, Toyota Kirloskar, Godrej, Flipkart, Amazon,

Vedanta Group, Nestle, Parle Products, RPG Group, KPMG and Ashok Leyland are among those that will continue with work from home (WFH) for their corporate and regional offices even though several state governments have indicated an easing of curbs from early next month.

Many corporates will continue with the policy until August-September and then take a call depending on the infection rate, vaccination coverage and the possibility of a third wave. "Our staff wellbeing is of utmost priority for us. As a precautionary measure we are encouraging them to work from home," said Neeraj Akhoury, CEO India, LafargeHolcim and Ambuja Cements.

Home Run

Cos say staff safety priority now

Unlikely to call employees back to office until they get both the doses



Longer gap for Covishield vax doses could delay reopening of workplaces

Focus on vaccinating labour at plants to prevent manufacturing disruptions

Manufacturers have put in place strict masking, distancing and other protocols for workers



Vedanta Group chief of HR Madhu Srivastava said plant operations are functional, but it is in no rush to bring anybody back to its corporate offices. Vaccinating staff and ensuring their safety are the priority now, she said.

Flipkart will persist with work from home till August — it was supposed to have ended in May — and may extend it further. Amazon too is likely to extend it until September, industry executives said. Amazon India said staff with work that can effectively be done from home can continue to do that until the situation stabilises — a drop in cases and higher vaccine availability.

Cautious Approach

An ITC spokesperson said state and local guidelines, the pace of vaccinations and a reduction in cases will be critical factors that will shape future action.

The cautious approach of corporates this time round is in contrast with last year when most opened offices as India lifted the nationwide **lockdown** in phases and attendance got to 50-70% until the second wave hit the country hard in March-April. The 2020 lockdown was imposed at the end of March and stage-wise relaxations began in May that year.

Employees have adapted well to a permanent work-from-anywhere policy and there has been no loss in productivity, said S Venkatesh, president, group HR, RPG Group. The group will continue to work remotely until the pandemic has

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been brought under control.

India's largest biscuit maker Parle Products and KPMG will keep offices shut until end June and decide later on staff returning, depending on the situation. Motilal Oswal Financial Service also said it was in no rush to reopen.

Cos Eye Vax Targets

Companies are trying to complete the vaccination of employees at the earliest despite the inoculation programme having slowed. Another factor that could delay reopening is the longer gap between the first and second Covishield doses. From an initial four weeks, this interval grew to six-eight weeks and now is at 12-16 weeks. This means it will take longer for employees to be fully inoculated, executives said.

Since infection rates are high, companies will refrain from calling people to office unless they've got their second dose, said Godrej Appliances business head Kamal Nandi.

Automakers such as Maruti and Tata Motors have moved to a hybrid model with some employees in critical roles coming to office for one or two days.

There are certain roles that will require a physical presence in the workplace, says Ravindra Kumar GP, president and chief human resources officer, Tata Motors. For office-based roles, it has instituted a hybrid model — employees attend office twice a week on a rotational basis.

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protocols for workers whose presence is needed on the shop floor, apart from trying to get them vaccinated and seeking to accommodate such staff on the premises.

Automakers haven't taken any decision on when managerial staff should return to office.

There's a "new normal for tasks that can be done remotely. Who stays home and who comes to work is being decided between the 'reporting manager' and 'the team,'" said Rajesh Uppal, member of the executive board and HR head at Maruti Suzuki.

A Toyota Kirloskar spokesperson said, "WFH is the only solution for office employees during these challenging times and at the centre of this is the need to 'stay connected' through elevated communication."

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Some companies said they will attempt a graded opening of offices from next

month for employees who have been vaccinated. Panasonic India CEO Manish Sharma said office attendance will largely be linked with vaccination from next month.

Welspun India CEO Dipali Goenka said the company will have a hybrid and distributed workplace structure. She said while most tasks are being done remotely without any significant drop in productivity or quality, over time face-to-face interaction is required to facilitate collaboration, build relationships, solve complex challenges and generate ideas.

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By Bikash Singh, ET Bureau Last Updated: May 26, 2021, 09:43 PM IST

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Synopsis

The cheques were handed during a brief ceremony held at Chief Minister's Office at Janata Bhawan today. Principal Secretary Dr KK Dwivedi was also present in the ceremony.

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