



# Guideline for Implementing a Successful Return to Work Program



# PROGRAM SECTIONS

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## Overview

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Workplace injuries are costly. Although preventing injuries is the best way to protect employees and to control workers compensation costs, employers and employees need a way to manage injuries if they occur. A Return to Work Program assists in assuring that the employee obtains prompt medical care; both during the initial stages of recovery as well as during the subsequent return to productive employment. Employees want to maintain employment security by returning to work as quickly as possible after an injury. Employees respond well when employers offer them an opportunity to resume job responsibilities. Return to Work Programs facilitate the development and implementation of an individualized Return to Work policy immediately after the occurrence of the injury. A Return to Work Program promotes communication, establishes the roles of each participant and enables all parties access to a documented process.

### Purpose

The purpose of a Return to Work Program is to allow an employee who sustains a work related injury to return to job duties as soon as possible. This program minimizes the disruption and cost to employers by providing temporary transitional work duties to employees.

# Overview

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Benefits of a Return to Work Program:

## **The Employer Benefits By:**

- Reduced staff turnover and training costs by retaining experienced and knowledgeable employees
- Ability to participate in and contribute to the rehabilitation process
- Improved morale and employee relations by offering Return to Work plans for both work-related and non work related injury or illness
- Minimized nonrecoverable expenses such as employee benefits, the hiring and training of replacement employees, and the cost of inexperienced employees
- Improved accident experience, which may be important for companies bidding on contracts
- Completion of tasks that may have been delayed due to other priorities
- Decreased number of grievances and arbitrations

## **Injured Employee Benefits By:**

- Maintaining the employment relationship, which provides job security and financial independence
- Minimizing the loss of physical fitness and muscle tone due to inactivity
- Maintaining in-house/employer pension plans, medical benefits, dental plans, and group life insurance
- Maintaining social contact and support from coworkers and friends
- Focusing on their abilities and not their disabilities
- Maintaining positive mental outlook
- Maintaining necessary job skills
- Alleviating feelings of dependency and lack of control
- Returning sooner to a healthy, productive home and work life
- Reducing the amount of time for recovery
- Reducing impact on family relations

## **Coworkers Benefit By:**

- Improved productivity because skilled and productive employees are kept on the job
- Minimized accident costs, including workers compensation costs as well as nonrecoverable expenses such as employee benefits, the hiring and training of replacement employees, and the cost of inexperienced employees
- Improved accident experience, which may be important for companies bidding on contracts.
- Completion of meaningful alternative duties that may not have otherwise been done due to other priorities

## **Health Care Professionals Benefit By:**

- Providing focused and coordinated treatment for the injured employee through the Return to Work Program
- Using a collaborative approach allows for more efficient use of health care resources and expedites the return to work of an injured employee

# Overview

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## Indirect Cost:

### To Employer:

- Hiring quality replacement employees
- Lower workplace morale
- Increased training costs
- Overtime
- Nonproductive work time (associated with accident)
- Increased premiums
- Loss of potential revenue

### To Workforce:

- Training and managing replacement employees
- Increased benefit costs

\*Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) provides “\$afety Pays” for businesses to estimate costs (direct and indirect) of occupational injuries and measure impact on a employer’s profitability.

To access OSHA’s tool follow the link below:

**[\\$afety Pays](#)**

## Overview

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### **RTW Program Elements:**

- Policies & Procedures
- Defined Roles & Responsibilities
- Job Descriptions
- Restricted/Transitional Job Duties
- Forms
  - Attending Physician Report
  - Letter to Physician
  - Letter to Employee
  - IPEP Claims Reporting Forms
  - Employee and Supervisor Work Restrictions Acknowledgment

# 2 Implementing RTW Policies and Procedures



# Policies

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## Purpose

A policy is a deliberate system of principles to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes. A policy is a statement of intent and is implemented as a procedure or protocol.

The individual policies that reflect the principles of the organization are an integral part of any a successful Return to Work Program. Establishing a policy which details what employees can expect from the organization, and what the organization expects from the employees assists in laying the foundation for a healthy work environment.



## Objectives

- Create clear, concise, and simple language
- Explain the rule, not how to implement the rule
- Easily accessible by staff
- Represent a consistent, logical framework

# Procedures

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## Procedures



## Purpose

A written procedure is a document that instructs employees on executing one or more activities of a policy. It describes the sequence of steps and specifies for each step what needs to be done; often including when the procedure should be executed and by whom.

## Objectives

- Address how to implement policies
- Express who is responsible for each task
- Identify steps to be taken, and by whom
- Should not be unnecessarily restrictive and should provide options when feasible



# Sample Policy and Procedures

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## Return To Work Policy

### POLICY STATEMENT

It is the policy of (employer name) to maintain and support a Return to Work Program. The program is designed to minimize the disruption and uncertainty, for both (employer name) and its employees by providing transitional work duties to employees.

The cornerstone of this Return to Work Program is communication. As such, a specific responsibility for communicating return to work information is central to its success and is the foundation of this program.

### PROCEDURES

- I. The employee will be provided with a list of expected responsibilities following a workplace injury.
- II. While off work with an injury contact with (supervisor/contact name) should be maintained as follows:
  - i. The employee is to report his/her return to work status after each doctor's appointment. Unless otherwise arranged between the employee and (supervisor/contact name), this shall be done in person by providing a copy of a work status form provided by the authorized treating physician's office.
  - ii. The employee should contact (supervisor/contact name) by telephone or in person after each doctor's appointment. This contact is intended to keep the employee informed of pertinent employer information and the employer informed of the employee's current condition/needs for return to work.
  - iii. If (supervisor/contact name) is unavailable, the alternative contact would be (alternate contact).
- III. Information regarding available transitional work, either in the form of a specific job analysis/task list or a request for physical capacity information, will be provided to the authorized treating physician. A job analysis for the employee's regular job will be provided if one is available. This may be done by (RTW Coordinator).
- IV. The employee will be assigned to a job or task(s) according to the restrictions of the attending physician and the business needs of (employer name) at the time of the release. This assignment may be in a different department or on a different shift than worked at the time of injury. The authorized treating physician may restrict or limit the number of hours an employee works, without providing actual physical restrictions or limits. The light duty assignment may include a portion of the regular job.

## Sample Policy and Procedures (Continued)

- V. Transitional jobs are temporary in nature and are intended to ease the employee back to regular duty. The transitional work will be monitored by (supervisor/contact name) on an ongoing basis. Should the authorized treating physician change the employee's restrictions, the transitional assignment may be adjusted accordingly. In any case, employees will not be expected to exceed the restrictions outlined by the authorized treating physician.

The transitional assignment will be reviewed periodically. It may be extended or ended at the discretion of (employer name).

Any issues with the transitional assignment will be discussed with the employee and any necessary changes will be defined.

- VI. When the authorized treating physician provides a release to transitional work, it is recommended that a job offer letter be given in person or sent CERTIFIED mail, with a response requested. It should include:

- i. A description of the job duties
- ii. The start date and hours,
- iii. The duration of the job (if known)
- iv. Where and to whom to report
- v. The wage to be paid
- vi. A copy of the work release and/or signed job analysis.

- VII. The transitional job will end when one of the following occurs:

- i. The employee is released for full duty regular employment
- ii. The employee returns to a job that is not part of the Return to Work Program
- iii. The transitional job is no longer available or has not been extended under the terms of this program

\* For the purpose of this Return to Work Program, an "injury" also includes an occupational disease as defined by Indiana Workers Compensation Statutes.

# 3 Defining Roles and Responsibilities



## Roles and Responsibilities

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A Return to Work Program is intended to help employees return to work following an injury as soon as the authorized treating physician deems it appropriate. All parties play an important role in achieving a successful RTW Program. Collaborative efforts with clearly defined roles and responsibilities are critical to the success of the program. This section provides examples of essential roles and responsibilities in the RTW Program.

### Essential Roles in RTW Program:

- Program Administrator (Employer)
  - Supervisor/Manager
  - Human Resources (HR) Manager/RTW Coordinator
  - Safety Director
- Injured Employee
- Claims Professional
- Additional Resources:
  - Physician
  - Therapist
  - Medical Case Manager
  - Risk Manager

# Employer

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## Supervisors/Managers

- Support the Return to Work Program by actively participating and cooperating with the Program Administrator.
- Provide HR with a list of modified or restricted positions, if any, within their departments.
- Assist HR in identifying appropriate duties for injured employees in accordance with authorized treating physician's work restrictions.
- Ensure employees on restricted duty perform job tasks according to authorized treating physician's restrictions.
- Promote, communicate, and educate employee about the employer's commitment to the Return to Work Program.

## Human Resources (HR) Manager / RTW Coordinator

- Administer the Return to Work Program policies and procedures.
- Ensure all decisions regarding work availability and assignments comply with all authorized treating physician's work restrictions.
- With assistance from Supervisors/Managers, create an inventory of restricted duty jobs for each department.
- With Supervisor/Manager assistance, identify appropriate duties for injured employee in accordance with authorized treating physician's work restrictions.
- Maintain weekly contact with employees until they return to the workplace.
- Maintain appropriate documentation for each injured employee (physical restrictions, physician visits, employee progress etc.)

\*IPEP's Claims Reporting Procedures are attached in Appendix (Page 35)

## Injured Employee

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Employees have the following responsibilities following a workplace injury:

- Follow all employer protocols for safety and health
- Report all injuries and illnesses **immediately**
- Assist the RTW Coordinator in completing necessary forms
- Support, contribute, and participate in the RTW Program
- Participate in the RTW training provided by the RTW Coordinator
- Communicate with the RTW Coordinator and IPEP on a weekly basis until released from care
- Follow the authorized treating physician's directives
- Follow medical restrictions both at work and home

## Claims Representative

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- Investigate claim facts to determine compensability
- Consult with authorized treating physician to facilitate treatment plan and duration of disability
- Communicate Return to Work Program and provide functional job descriptions (with physical demands) to authorized treating physicians.
- Facilitate Return to Work within modified/transitional duty
- Maintain regular communication with RTW Coordinator and injured employee to ensure active engagement in RTW Program
- Manage medical treatment and provide authorization for appropriate medical care to support recovery
- Pay applicable statutory benefits

# 4

## Developing Job Descriptions





# Job Descriptions



Writing and maintaining job descriptions must be an ongoing task. Most job descriptions are vague or may not provide enough information on which to make decisions about whether an injured employee can physically handle a particular job. The importance of job descriptions for employers cannot be underestimated.

The more detailed and accurate information provided in the job description, the easier it is for the authorized treating physician to determine if an injured employee can safely perform the job. Reviewing the job descriptions also allows the employer to determine what transitional duties would accommodate the injured employee's work restrictions.

5 Strength Categories	Key Components	Other Considerations
Sedentary	Job Title	Are long periods of standing necessary?
Light	Description of Job	Is Driving a requirement?
Medium	Description of Workplace	What cognitive skills are needed?
Heavy	Environmental Conditions	Does the job require the employee to bend, kneel, reach? How high?
Very Heavy	Equipment Utilized	Would climbing be important?

## Job Description (Sample)

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Employer's Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Job Title \_\_\_\_\_  
Description of Job \_\_\_\_\_  
Description of Workplace \_\_\_\_\_  
Equipment Utilized \_\_\_\_\_  
Hours Worked Daily: \_\_\_\_\_  
Environmental Conditions (Temperature extremes, air quality, noise, heights, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### OTHER

Driving \_\_\_\_\_  
Use of Hands \_\_\_\_\_  
Operate Foot Controls \_\_\_\_\_

### Comments

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Employer Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Employee Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Physical Requirements

LIFT	Regularly	Frequently	Occasionally	Not At All
0 -10 lbs.				
11 – 20 lbs.				
21 – 50 lbs.				
51 – 100 lbs.				
101+ lbs.				
CARRY	Regularly	Frequently	Occasionally	Not At All
0 -10 lbs.				
11 – 20 lbs.				
21 – 50 lbs.				
51 – 100 lbs.				
101+ lbs.				
MOTION	5-8 Hours	3-5 Hours	1-3 Hours	Not At All
Sit				
Stand/Walk				
Bend				
Squat				
Climb				
Kneel				
Push/Pull				
Reach				
Crawl				
Overhead Reach				
Grasp (Hands)				

# 5 Bank of Light Duties



## Light or Transitional Duty

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Potential alternate work assignments, and ways to modify existing jobs to accommodate restrictions, should be determined before an injury occurs. The RTW Coordinator should meet with other employees, supervisors and department heads to identify assignments that could be performed by employees with work restrictions. Each job should be analyzed to determine an inventory of transitional duty tasks.

Often there are important jobs or projects currently not being done but could be performed by an employee with restrictions. Other times, an employee is able to perform part of their regular job however they may need assistance with certain tasks or workstation modifications.

**Job Modification** — Regular job of the injured employee is modified to meet restrictions.

- Workstation modifications can reduce injuries and improve productivity for all employees. Example of employee's workstation modifications may include:
  - Providing material handling aids
  - Adjustment of height and/or reach distances
  - Assembly fixtures
  - Power tools
  - Ergonomically designed tools
  - Modification to a sitting workstation
- Work hours modifications:
  - Reduction in hours
  - Taking additional breaks
  - Working a different shift

**Job "Sharing"** — Specific tasks that exceed restrictions are shared with other employees

- Employee is paired with another employee:
  - Tasks that exceed restrictions are performed (or assisted) by the non-injured employee
  - Tasks within restrictions traded to the injured employee, if possible
  - Sharing their job with a part time or temporary employee
- Employee is be paired with more than one employee:
  - Job sharing is rotated among more than one employee
- Job rotating:
  - Entire jobs are rotated among employees, thereby reducing the amount of time the injured employee spends doing more strenuous tasks

# Sedentary Work – Phase I

## *Physical Restrictions*

- 0 - 5 pounds lifting, carrying, pushing/pulling
- No bending, twisting, crawling, kneeling or climbing activities
- Change positions frequently, every 20 - 30 minutes (stand, sit, walk)
- Injured body parts not usable
- An extra 15 minute break will be provided every 1½ hours. Example: with a 7:00 am start time, breaks would be at 8:30 am, 10:15 am, 12 noon (lunch) and 2:00 p.m.

## *Sample Job Activities:*

- Desk duties
- Opening mail
- Ordering supplies
- Processing invoices and payments
- Answering telephone
- Updating manuals and best practices
- Any other tasks within the restrictions provided by the authorized treating physician

# Light Work – Phase II

## *Physical Restrictions*

- 6 - 15 pounds lifting, carrying, pushing/pulling
- Very limited bending, kneeling, climbing and use of good body mechanics
- No twisting, stooping, crawling
- Change positions frequently, every 30 - 40 minutes (stand, sit, walk)
- An extra 15 minute break will be provided every 1½ hours. Example: with a 7:00 am start time, breaks would be at 8:30 am, 10:15 am, 12 noon (lunch) and 2:00 p.m.

## *Sample Job Activities:*

- Inventory Parts and supplies
- Filing
- Vacuuming or sweeping
- Light assembly or manufacturing tasks
- Employee's regular job duties with the assistance of job modification and/or job sharing
- Any other tasks within the restrictions provided by the authorized treating physician

# Medium Work – Phase III

## *Physical Restrictions*

- 16 - 30 pounds lifting, carrying, pushing/pulling
- Moderate amounts of bending, kneeling, climbing and use of good body mechanics
- No twisting, stooping, crawling
- Change positions at least once hour
- Normal breaks

## *Sample Job Activities:*

- Building/Grounds Maintenance
- Quality control inspections
- Employee's regular job duties with the assistance of job modification and/or job sharing
- Any other tasks within the restrictions provided by the authorized treating physician

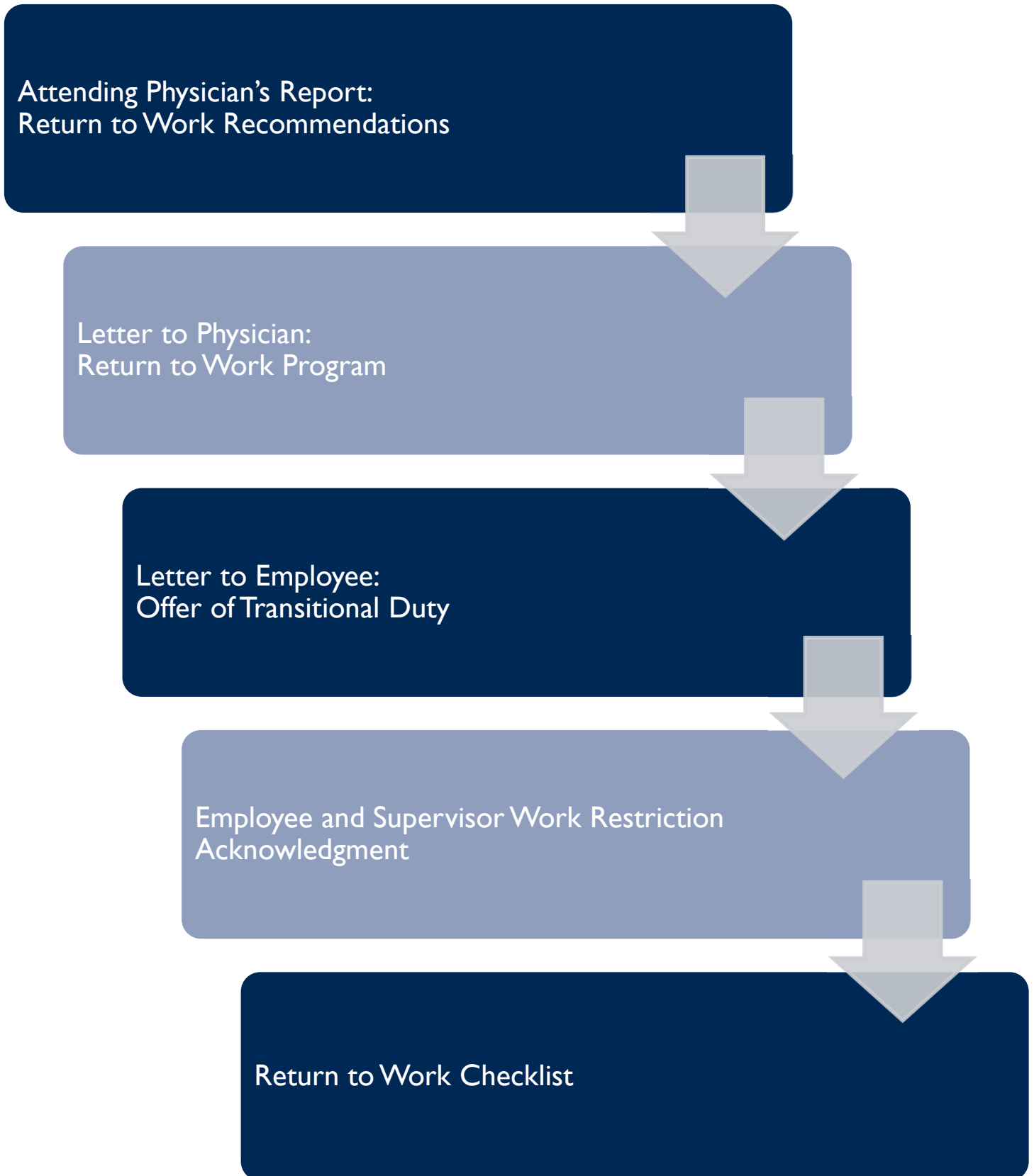


# 6 Sample Forms



## Formwork

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# Attending Physician's Report: Return to Work Recommendations

Patient's Last Name	First	M.I.	Date of Injury

The following to be completed by the physician

Diagnosis/Condition:

I saw and treated this patient on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) and based on the above diagnosis/condition:

- The patient may return to work with no limitations on \_\_\_\_\_ (date).
- The patient may return to work on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) with the following restrictions:

Sedentary Work. Occasionally lifting 10 pounds maximum, with frequent lifting and/or carrying of lighter objects such as file folders, laptop computers and small tools. Although a sedentary job is generally considered one which involves sitting, a certain amount of walking and standing is often necessary in carrying out job duties. Jobs are sedentary if walking and standing are required only occasionally and other sedentary criteria are met.

Light Work. Occasionally lifting 20 pounds maximum, with frequent lifting and/or carrying of objects weighing up to 10 pounds. Even though the weight lifted may be only a negligible amount, a job is in this category when it requires walking or standing to a significant degree or when it involves sitting most of the time with a degree of pushing and pulling of arm and/or leg control.

Light-Medium Work. Occasionally lifting 30 pounds maximum, with frequent lifting and/or carrying of object weighing up to 20 pounds.

Medium Work. Occasionally lifting 50 pounds maximum, with frequent lifting and/or carrying of objects weighing up to 25 pounds.

Heavy Work. Occasionally lifting 100 pounds maximum, with frequent lifting and/or carrying of objects weighing up to 50 pounds.

A. In an 8 hour work day patient may:

Stand/Walk:

- |                                    |                                    |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> None      | <input type="checkbox"/> 3-5 Hours |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1-3 Hours | <input type="checkbox"/> 5-8 Hours |

Sit:

- |                                    |                                    |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1-3 Hours | <input type="checkbox"/> 3-5 Hours |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5-8 Hours |                                    |

Drive:

- |                                    |                                    |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> None      | <input type="checkbox"/> 3-5 Hours |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1-3 Hours | <input type="checkbox"/> 5-8 Hours |

B. Patient may use hand(s) for repetitive:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Single Grasping   | <input type="checkbox"/> Pushing & Pulling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fine Manipulation |  |

C. Patient may use foot/feet for repetitive movement as in operating foot controls:

- |                              |                             |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

D. Patient May:

	Not at All	Occasionally	Frequently
Bend	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Twist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Squat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Climb	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reach	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other restrictions, instructions or prescribed medications:

Heavy Work. Occasionally lifting 100 pounds maximum, with frequent lifting and/or carrying of objects weighing up to 50 pounds.

- The above restrictions are in effect until \_\_\_\_\_ (date)  
or until patient is re-evaluated on \_\_\_\_\_ (date)
- Patient is totally incapacitated at this time. Patient will be re-evaluated on \_\_\_\_\_ (date)
- Referred to: \_\_\_\_\_  
(name of specialty)
- Return here on \_\_\_\_\_ (date/time)

Physician's Signature

Date

Authorization to release information

I hereby authorize my attending physicians and/or hospital to release any information or copies thereof acquired in the course of my examination or treatment for the injury/illness identified above to my above to my employer or my employer's representative.

Patient's Signature

Date

# Sample Letter to Physician — Return to Work Program

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Date

Name of Physician

Address 1

Address 2

City, State Zip

RE: Return to Work Program

Dear (Name of Physician):

Thank you for treating (employee's name). We look forward to (employee name) returning safely to work. We designed a Return to Work Program focused on bringing employees back to work as soon as they are able to perform transitional duties.

Please complete the attached "Attending Physician's Report: Return to Work Recommendations" form and fax it to (RTW Coordinator's fax number).

If you have questions, please call me at (RTW Coordinator's fax number).

Sincerely,

(Name of Return to Work Coordinator)

Return to Work Coordinator

# Sample Letter to Employee - Offer of Transitional Duty

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Date

Name of Employee

Address 1

Address 2

City, State Zip

RE: Return to Work Offer of Transitional Duty

Dear (Name of Employee):

We are pleased to learn Dr. (Name of Physician) released you to return to transitional duty effective (date). We have transitional work available that falls within your restrictions. We are looking forward to your return to work.

Please report to (Name of Supervisor of Transitional Duty Work) on (Date) at (Time).

If you have questions, please call me at (RTW Coordinator's phone number).

Sincerely,

(Name of Return to Work Coordinator)

Return to Work Coordinator

# Employee and Supervisor Work Restriction Acknowledgment

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Date \_\_\_\_\_

Attending Physician's Report: Return to Work Recommendations

## Supervisor

I understand, take responsibility for, and acknowledge the restrictions placed on (employee name) by Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, in the Attending Physician Report dated \_\_\_\_\_.

Supervisor's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Employee

I understand, take responsibility for, and acknowledge the restrictions placed on me by Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, in the Attending Physician Report dated \_\_\_\_\_.

Employee's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Employee's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Physician Listing



Designated Physician	Address/Location	Phone/Fax	Contact
(Insert employer choice of Emergency Room)			
(Insert employer choice of designated physician/clinic)			



## Return to Work Checklist

### Management Program

- Written RTW policy approved by Senior Leadership, available to all staff.
- Policy outlines responsibility and accountability, as well as specific roles for management, supervisors, and employees.
- Employees are trained in the RTW policy as part of the initial orientation.

### Transitional Work

- Written job descriptions for all positions detailing ordinary job tasks and physical demands.
- Potential temporary work assignments identified.
- Review injury specific restrictions and design temporary modified tasks or other transitional work strategies.
- Supervisors and managers trained in providing transitional work in their departments.

### Coordination with IPEP Claims and Medical Providers

- Designated preferred medical provider identified.
- Designated person in place to coordinate communication with employee, IPEP, authorized treating physician and case manager.
- Medical provider aware of the RTW policy and temporary work assignment available.
- Attending Physician's Report completed by the medical provider to be used as a guide for transitional work.
- Job offer letter sent to employee when released to transitional work.



# APPENDIX

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Contacts List



Claims Reporting Kit



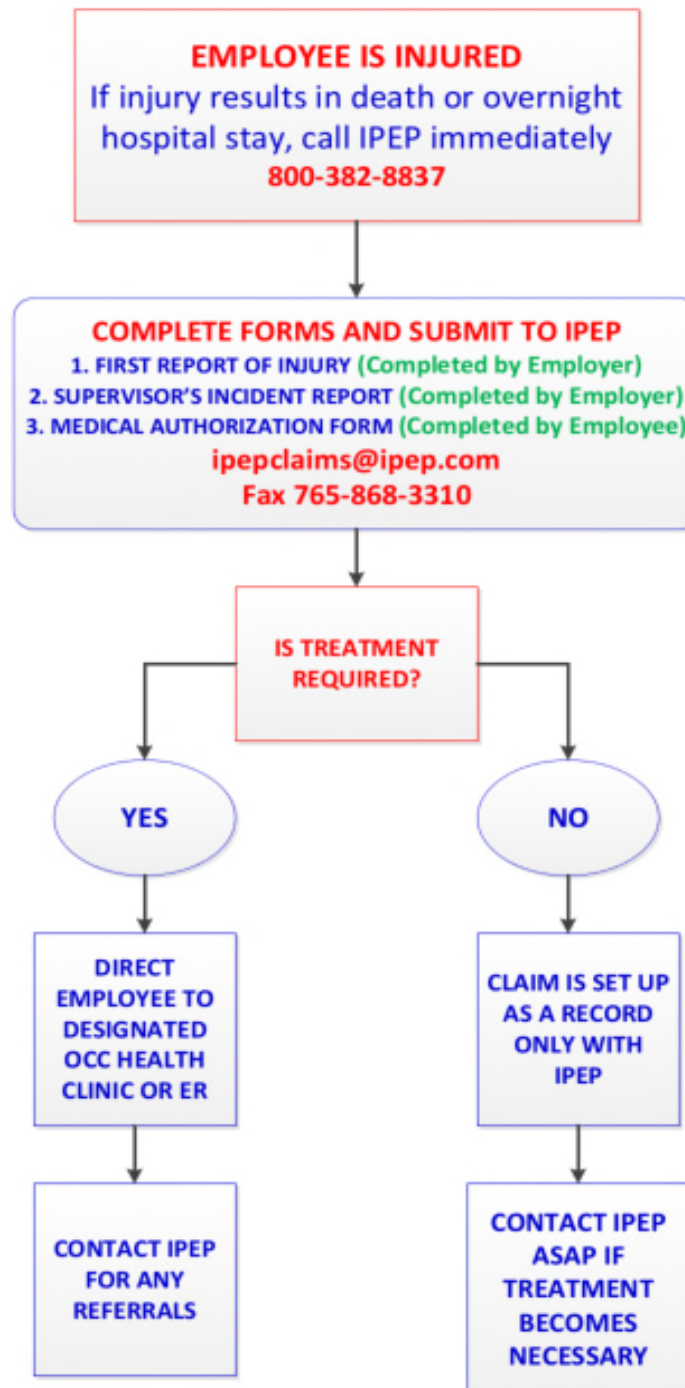
# Contacts

INTERNAL	IPEP
HUMAN RESOURCES	REPORTING
	<a href="mailto:ipepclaims@ipep.com">ipepclaims@ipep.com</a> F: (765)868-3310
RTW COORDINATOR	CLAIMS ADJUSTER
SUPERVISOR	RISK MANAGER
OTHER	



# Claims Reporting

## IPEP REPORTING PROCEDURES



03/2017

For more information: <https://www.ipep.com/claims>