Poll: Large Employers Consider a Range of Methods to Safely Return Employees to Work, Address Racial Inequity

Most major employers are embracing social distancing and other measures to safely bring employees back to work amid the new normal imposed by COVID-19, a recent Pacific Business Group on Health poll showed.
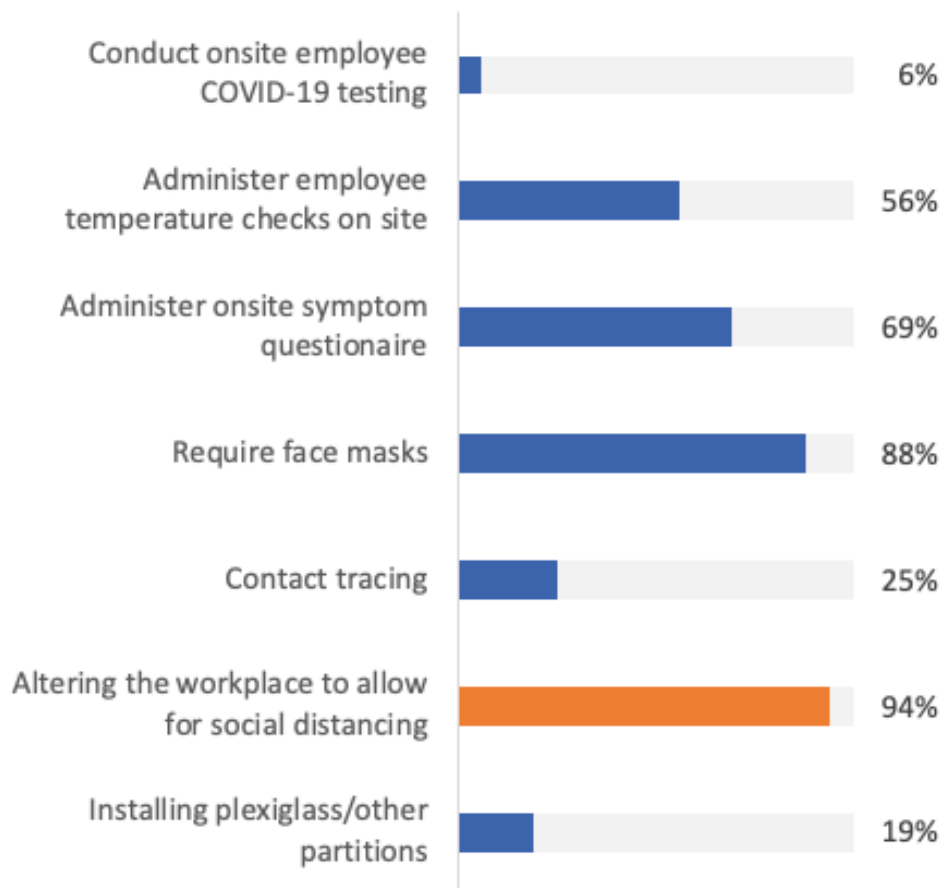
The poll of representatives of 40 large employers also found many companies are increasingly exploring opportunities to address health and benefit issues related to racial equity in response to recent social unrest.

Organizations represented included manufacturers, technology firms, municipalities, retailers and educational institutions.

According to the poll:

- 94% of respondents are altering workspaces to allow for social distancing
- 88% are requiring face masks
- 69% are administering onsite symptom questionnaires
- 56% are administering employee temperature checks onsite

Which of the following activities are your company taking to ensure the health of your employees upon return to on-site work? Please check all that apply. (Multiple choice)

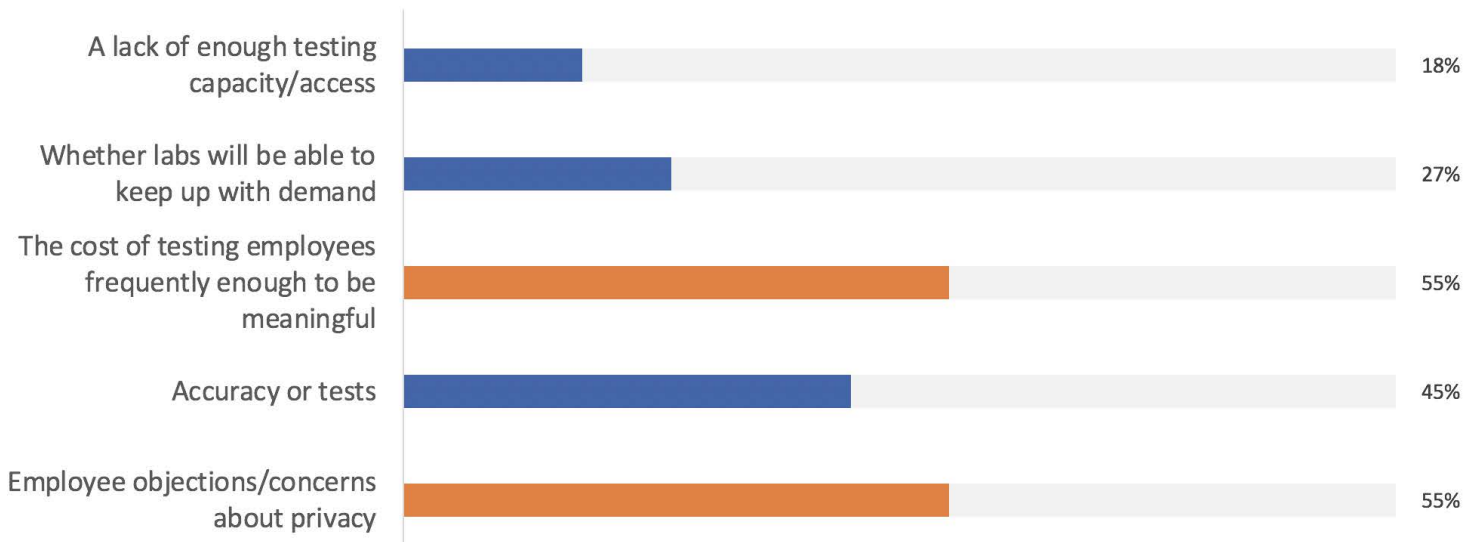| Activity	Percentage
Conduct onsite employee COVID-19 testing	6%
Administer employee temperature checks on site	56%
Administer onsite symptom questionaire	69%
Require face masks	88%
Contact tracing	25%
Altering the workplace to allow for social distancing	94%
Installing plexiglass/other partitions	19%

Testing Concerns

The majority of respondents (56%) said their companies hadn't yet made a decision about whether to implement onsite COVID-19 testing to enable employees to safely return to work. Just 11% said they were currently testing employees several times a week, while one-third (33%) said they had no plans to test.

Will you require regular COVID testing of employees returning to onsite work?

Yes, several times per week	11%
No, we won't require testing	33%
We haven't yet decided	56%
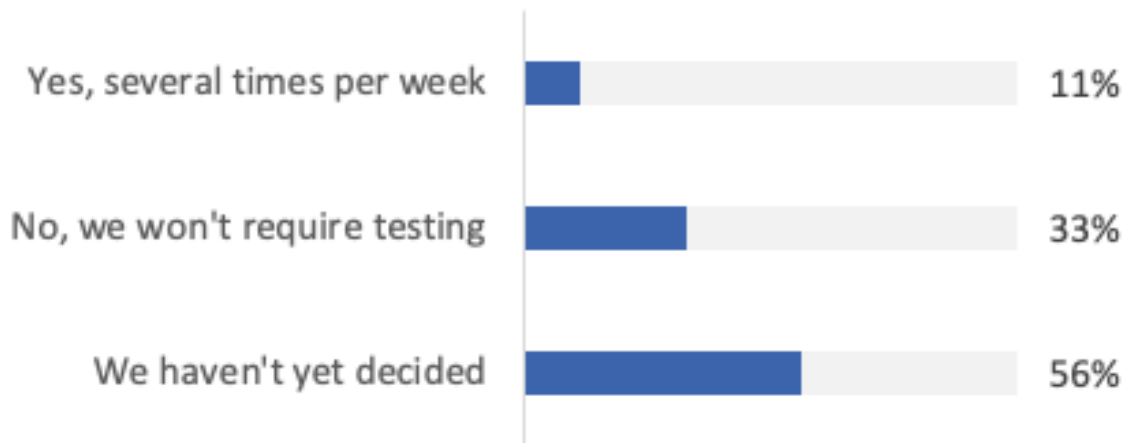
Substantial concerns about testing centered on potential employee objections or worries about privacy (55%), the cost of testing frequently enough to be meaningful (55%), and questions about test accuracy (45%).

What is your biggest concern about your ability to test employees for COVID-19 upon return to work? (Select all that apply) (Multiple choice)

Concern	Percentage
A lack of enough testing capacity/access	18%
Whether labs will be able to keep up with demand	27%
The cost of testing employees frequently enough to be meaningful	55%
Accuracy or tests	45%
Employee objections/concerns about privacy	55%

Phased Returns

During a roundtable discussion, several employer representatives said their firms intend to continue allowing employees to work from home for the foreseeable future. One organization said workers have been informed they won't be expected to return for 12-18 months.

Several said phased employee returns were planned, with one company anticipating employees won't begin coming back until September at the earliest. In the interim, all staff will have access to a learning module that will outline new work guidelines and what to expect when they do return.

A representative of a manufacturing company that has already brought employees back said staff are required to check out personal protection equipment upon arrival at the workplace. If an employee tests positive for the virus, he said, they must inform their manager to determine which colleagues may have been exposed.

Addressing Racial Inequity

On a separate track, the poll found companies are engaging in practical steps aimed at addressing underlying, minority-related health issues in response to recent social upheaval. Specifically:

- Most respondents (64%) are placing a greater focus on social determinants of health
- Nearly half (45%) are revaluating their benefit design to address health system inequities
- Nearly half (45%) are expanding access areas of clinics and network providers

As providers of health benefits to roughly half of Americans, employers said they have a role to play in addressing existing inequities in the delivery of medical services and the social determinants that impact the health of their workforce. And they are actively planning for how they can do more to bring greater equity to the system, their employees and their families.

Will you be engaging in any of the following in response to the recent social unrest? (Select all that apply) (Multiple Choice)

Revaluating benefit design to address health system inequities	45%
Placing a greater focus on social determinants of health	64%
Expanding access areas of clinics/network providers	45%
Requiring our health plans to provide race-related utilization data	9%
Other	27%