



Google Delays Office Reopening Amid Delta Variant Outbreak

Search Engine Giant Retools Return-to-Office Strategy, To Require Employee Vaccinations



Google is changing its plans to bring employees back to the office as coronavirus cases tick up across the United States. (Getty Images)

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Search engine giant Google is the latest major employer to delay plans to fully reopen its offices as coronavirus cases start to inch back up across the country and the more contagious delta variant of the virus gains a foothold.

The [Mountain View, California](#)-based company, with a U.S. workforce of about 145,000, said Wednesday it would push its initial September return-to-office date to at least mid-October, an announcement that comes about a week after fellow tech giant Apple made a similar call. Both companies were among some of the first to send workers home at the pandemic's start early last year.

For Google, its postponed return also includes a decision to implement a vaccine mandate for employees if and when they return, another step more employers are taking as they scramble to keep up with the evolving pandemic.

While U.S. case counts and hospitalizations were improving earlier this year and offices and economies across the country started to reopen, nearly two-thirds of U.S. counties are now reporting higher or substantial COVID-19 transmission rates, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

After the U.S. averaged more than 57,300 new daily cases last week, the number of hospitalizations reached 26,698 on Saturday, more than double the number at the start of the month, according to the CDC. Some public health officials say the country could once again hit more than 200,000 daily cases and a steady increase in deaths in a matter of weeks.

"Getting vaccinated is one of the most important ways to keep ourselves and our communities healthy in the months ahead," Google CEO Sundar Pichai wrote in an email to employees, which was first reported by the [New York Times](#). Pichai said the vaccine mandate would apply to all of Google's office locations across the country "in the coming weeks" and to other regions "in the coming months."

Google's and [Apple's decisions](#) to hold off plans to reopen offices reaffirm the tech industry's position at the vanguard of corporate pandemic response. It's a response that the commercial real estate industry is following closely to get a sense of when office property demand will return to prior levels. Working at home has provided an opportunity for some companies to consider instituting a combination of remote and in-office work to reduce real estate costs.

Employers who have already returned workers to the office face a different challenge: keep soldiering on and risk spreading the disease or send everyone back home and risk destabilizing their workforce and balance sheets all over again.

Google reported a [record-breaking](#) revenue streak on Tuesday thanks in small part to the pandemic, which produced a surge in internet browsing and online shopping.



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