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Illinois Gov. reveals detailed plans for reopening: what employers need to know

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Gov. JB Pritzker just unveiled his new reopening plan for the state of Illinois. The projected 5-phase “Illinois Restored” plan was created to help safely reopen businesses in the state without causing an influx of COVID-19 infections. But what does Illinois’ phases reopening mean for employers and their staff, and should we expect similar plans from other lawmakers across the country?

“Gov. Pritzker’s reopening plan is based heavily on whether the incoming numbers will support plans to open up the state a bit more,” says Rob Wilson, President of Employco USA. “But, if we are seeing an uptick in COVID-19 infections, a sustained increase in hospital admission, or if Illinois’s hospitals start to become overtaxed, the phases will reset back to the start.”

Wilson says that just because the state is starting to talk about reopening, along with several other states, that we should not expect things to go back to normal right away.

“There is going to be a new normal established,” says Wilson. “For example, many areas (like St. Louis County) are saying they will be adopting a ‘no mask, no service’ protocol in which all employees and customers will be required to wear masks. Other companies say they will stagger the return of their employees, for example, bringing just a handful of employees at a time into the office, and rotating work days so that it does not become too crowded and people don’t congregate too closely to one another.”

Wilson also says we should expect for offices to be rearranged, with desks being moved further apart, communal break rooms and coffee makers being closed to employee use, and hand sanitizer everywhere.

“Some of these changes are going to be sustained long into the future,” says Wilson. “Many employers may be noticing that work-from-home is an ideal solution for some of their staff, and they may be much more willing to look at the way their staff structures their hours. We may be moving away from a 9-5 workday in which employees work all day, take lunch together and breaks together, and then leave and commute home in the same wave. We have to get really clever about how we reopen in order to make sure businesses can start to become robust again, and that is going to mean letting go of some traditional ideas about employees and their workday.”