

The district believes that it is important to retain, preserve, and maintain its most valuable resources—the well-being, skills, knowledge, and experience of employees at their most productive level. The Return to Work Program is designed to allow employees for both work and non-work-related injuries and illnesses to return to work as soon as reasonably possible. This may include modifying the employee's regular job or, if available, providing temporary alternate work depending on the medical provider's authorization.

A written "Return to Work Plan" must be established for any employee returning to duty in a less than full capacity. This may be based on a host of limitations prescribed by the employee's physician, such as restrictions relating to hours of work and/or physical demands, such as standing, bending, lifting, walking, and/or climbing.

### **Eligibility**

The Return to Work Program is open to all district employees who have been released by their treating physician, Agreed Medical Examiner (AME), Qualified Medical Examiner (QME) or Independent Medical Examiner (IME) with temporary work restrictions.

The employee must provide to the Department of Human Resources a written statement from their treating physician that:

- A. Certifies the employee has a temporary condition.
- B. Releases the employee to return to work with restrictions.
- C. Identifies the employee's current physical limitations.
- D. Estimates the duration of the work restrictions.

If the physician does not specify work restrictions, or there is any question regarding the employee's ability to work or question needing clarification of the treating physician's instructions, the district may, with the employee's authorization, contact the physician to see if transitional work is appropriate.

Eligible employees are those with either a work or non-work related injury/illness who have a medical condition that temporarily prevents him/her from performing some or all of the essential duties of their regular assignment.

Participation is strongly recommended for those employees who meet the program criteria. Cooperation and participation also applies to the supervisor/manager whose duty it is to assist the district in identifying appropriate transitional work.

### **Transitional Duty Assignment**

A Return to Work Plan shall include the start date and proposed length of assignment, the specific work location, the immediate supervisor, the work schedule, and a list of tasks to be performed. Any transitional duty assignment must comply at all times with the specific restrictions in the physician's statement. Specific assignments may be changed or discontinued in the event work restrictions can no longer be accommodated.

The expectation is that the transitional duty assignment will occur in the employee's usual work area, as long as modifications can reasonably be accommodated. The supervisor is responsible for working with the Director of Risk Management or designee to develop a list of tasks for the employee to ensure they comply with the employee's work restrictions. This must be finalized prior to the offer of an assignment. An employee's immediate supervisor for a transitional duty assignment shall establish specific performance expectations within the first week of the transitional duty assignment. Failure to meet performance expectations may result in withdrawal of the transitional duty assignment by the district.

When work cannot be reasonably modified and no alternative assignment is possible within the employee's usual work area, the Benefits Coordinator or Director of Risk Management/ADA Coordinator may seek to arrange an assignment in another department that has work that will fit the employee's temporary restrictions and match the employee's qualifications.

Efforts will be made to offer the injured/ill employee a transitional duty assignment during the employee's normal working hours.

No overtime is allowed for transitional duty participants.

### **Timeline**

- A. Return to work coordination begins with the initial report of injury to the Benefits Coordinator. The injured/ill employee must provide to Human Resources a status report from the treating physician within twenty-four (24) hours of a visit or prior to returning to work. (The employee is also required to provide timely status reports throughout the transitional duty assignment.)
- B. The Benefits Coordinator will explore options for a possible transitional duty assignment within three (3) days following the receipt of a medical release to return to work.
- C. Prior to the start of an assignment, the supervisor and employee will complete the Return to Work Plan, including a specified start date.
- D. The employee may remain in a transitional duty assignment for a maximum of forty (40) working days per injury or illness. Thereafter, the employee is placed on the appropriate leave of absence.

## **Communication with Treating Physician**

Upon receiving the employee's authorization, the Director of Risk Management may communicate directly with the treating physician to facilitate an understanding of the employee's limitations and the transitional duty the employee is being requested to perform.

## **Refusal of Transitional Duty Assignment**

If an employee refuses to sign the Return to Work plan or refuses the assignment by not arriving for work on the date and time specified, the Director of Risk Management is to be notified immediately.

Employees who refuse transitional duty may not be eligible for temporary disability benefits. In most instances, Workers' Compensation law allows temporary total disability benefits to be suspended in the event an employee refuses a valid transitional duty assignment.

## **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality will be assured for all medical information obtained in the transitional Return to Work Program. Information given to supervisors will be restricted to work status only.