

OPTIMISM IN THE NEW YEAR

India Inc Takes First Steps Back to Office; T&C Apply

What They're Doing

Lupin started Mumbai office from Mon with 25-30% workforce
M&M starts optional WFO this week

Marico will slowly begin WFO in next few months
HUL resumes some sales offices with 15-20% staff



RPG Group starts process of voluntary WFO for up to 15% staff

J&J, Deloitte give WFO option

Tata Motors to take a call soon

Cos starting work from office, but in limited fashion and with safety protocols

Rica Bhattacharyya & Lijee Phillip

Mumbai: A falling new-infections rate, news on vaccine rollout and some employee complaints on work-from-home fatigue are prompting companies to allow work from office (WFO) again, albeit mostly in a limited manner and keeping attendance voluntary in many cases. There are also strict safety protocols to be followed.

Some companies have started the process of resuming WFO with 15-30% staff strength in the New Year, while some have opened up offices but told staff members to come only on vo-

luntary and need basis—encouraging them to continue remote working as much as possible.

Several companies in Mumbai, where top corporates had mostly kept offices shut since March due to high rates of infection, are also in the process of beginning a gradual return.

Pharma and healthcare company Lupin soft-started its Mumbai office from Monday, with 25-30% workforce and strict safety protocols in place. "This is a sign of return to normalcy. The fear psychosis around infection is diminishing and people are eager to come back," said Yashwant Mahadik, president, global human resources, Lupin. "We will continue to review the situation on a weekly or fortnightly basis," he said. "Employees have to complete an online declaration of their health status before leaving home."

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"Those with travel history or those who have attended large gatherings recently have to take a Covid test and get clearance before coming to office," said Lupin's Mahadik.

Mahindra & Mahindra has started optional WFO from this week. "It's a great feeling to be able to go to office after more than nine months," managing director Pawan Goenka tweeted on Tuesday.

Marico chief HR officer Amit Prakash said, "We, at Marico, will slowly begin working from offices during the first few months, while following the strictest social distancing and hygiene norms set out by the government. We will take into account transportation and other constraints of our members." The company has also begun exploring and implementing a hybrid WFH and WFO model.

Starting this month, the likes of RPG Group, Johnson & Johnson and Deloitte are giving employees the option of coming to office, with a cap on the percentage of people present at a time.

Supratik Bhattacharyya, chief talent officer, RPG Group, said, "We will slowly start the process of coming to office but will be very cautious in our approach...to start with, it will be completely on a voluntary basis and will not exceed 15%." People today

are waiting to come back and many have reached out to us...however, we will not rush into anything."

"People are getting tired of sitting at home," said SV Nathan, partner and chief talent officer, Deloitte India. "We have told people to feel free to come to office but we still prefer them to continue operating from home. Until we feel there is a certain level of safety, we are not pushing people to return."

A Hindustan Unilever spokesperson said, "Our head office remains closed, with our people continuing to work from home... However, some of our sales offices have started operations in a staggered manner. Currently, 12-15% of staff in these offices are going to work."

Others such as Tata Motors are looking at plans to resume office and are expected to take a call in the next few weeks.

Siemens will allow staff to work on a remote basis for an average of two or three days a week and coming to office will be on need basis.

Companies have also put in place strict safety protocols, including social distancing between desks and regular sanitisation. Some like Lupin are only allowing people with personal vehicles to come to office. "In some cases, we are arranging individual vehicles for people who need to travel to work," said Mahadik.