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TOP LINE

Businesses at the country, state, and local level are haphazardly beginning the experiment of opening up even as patchwork regulations from federal and state officials often contradict each other. Calls are growing for federal financial support for testing to bolster national confidence and mitigate lost economic output. Yet, despite increasing clarity that the most economically viable route for reopening includes testing, tracking, and tracing for COVID-19, the federal government does not appear interested in heeding calls to implement such measures. Additionally, federal authorities state they will offer little more than “strategic direction,” which places the responsibility on states to develop their own plans and programs. Across the U.S., states have been reporting a daily average of approximately 218,000 tests daily, ten times less than health officials’ recommendations, due largely to a shortage of testing supplies.

Amid this gap, U.S. businesses have growing concerns about their ability to survive as economists project the U.S. economy is losing at least \$500 billion per month in domestic production. This leaves businesses to chart their own course, absent meaningful government support for reopening. Businesses are confronted with the challenge of preparing to reopen amid uncertainties regarding workforce and consumer risk tolerance. With a rolling virus and no coherent national testing strategy, the responsibility is immense. Business leaders must do their best to form and follow risk assessments which account for a high variability in local regulations and realities. Additionally, businesses’ ability to provide and pay for robust testing regimes, PPE, and consistent distancing protocols will bolster workforce confidence and decrease liability. Developing such measures requires that companies utilize – or build – trusted networks of local partners to navigate distinct regulatory environments and establish clear strategies to ensure consistent workforce and consumer protections.

Without government assistance, establishing company specific testing procedures will be challenging and costly; however, current evidence indicates robust testing is the only way for businesses to reopen without drastically increasing negative health outcomes and overwhelming the health system.

Question to Consider: As economies overseas and at the U.S. state level open up, what decisions are businesses and consumers willing to make?

COVID-19: THE HIGHLIGHTS

Shifting COVID-19 infection [curves](#) across the globe provide visual representation of the ebb and flow of COVID-19 cases despite significant drops in travel, a [reminder](#) that absent a vaccine the virus is here to stay. In the U.S., New York outlined a phased [plan](#) for reopening, beginning with construction and manufacturing. Other [states](#), particularly those in the southern U.S. are taking a far more relaxed approach such as permitting the reopening of malls, beaches, and bowling alleys, even as they fall short of government [criteria](#) to track COVID-19 exposure. Across the Atlantic, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson [returned](#) to work this week following over three weeks of recovery from COVID-19, even as critics call for investigations into the PM's slow response to the spread of the virus in the UK. In [Germany](#), social distancing measures remain in place as the country eases restrictions for a wide swath of businesses under specific guidelines and ramped up contact tracing. As much of France remains under quarantine, French unions expressed [concern](#) about Michelin's rapid return to production and criticized the company for prioritizing profit over worker safety, amid continued shortages of PPE and lack of distancing measures. Following the rapid containment of an early COVID-19 outbreak, the [Japanese](#) island of Hokkaido reinstated lockdowns following a resurgence of the virus after restrictions were lifted too quickly and too soon. Hokkaido's initial reopening fed business and tourist travel and a record number of new cases exactly three weeks after the initial lockdown ended, resulting in the second lockdown. Meanwhile [corruption](#) allegations surrounding food aid and PPE have surfaced in countries such as Colombia, Bangladesh, Romania, Argentina, and the U.S., among others, demonstrating that mismanagement – along with the virus – is a cross-border issue which is here to stay.

BEYOND THE NOISE

Cascading responsibility: Strategy [whiplash](#) at the U.S. federal government level is leaving [states](#) in charge of establishing a path for reopening. Amid the resulting patchwork of approaches at the state and local level, most U.S. businesses are taking a [measured](#) approach. Alongside questions regarding [liability](#), some business leaders fear another wave of lockdowns should reopening occur too rapidly, while others are more focused on public safety and the recognition that neither employees, nor consumers will return absent safety considerations. Across industries, decisions for responsible reopening are increasingly falling on business leaders.

- **Secure confidence:** Promote workforce safety and consumer confidence in steps to reopen. Establish new health and safety measures for both workers and consumers.

PPE pivot: U.S. companies [pivoting](#) to make personal protective equipment (PPE) describe [challenges](#) with basic supply chain logistics and identification of customers, even amid federal [seizures](#) of counterfeit PPE and other goods from China and Japan. Lack of guidance and centralized command and control are resulting in companies doing their own research and triage, amidst competing bids from federal, state, and local governments as well as hospitals and businesses. Proposals for increased

government [transparency](#) are slowly gaining traction in Congress; however, for the foreseeable future, businesses largely remain on their own in developing, delivering, and obtaining PPE.

- Secure delivery: Establish lessons learned for procurement of hard to obtain goods, including best practices for ensuring quality control standards are met. Source goods through respectable manufacturers or online sites.

School closures: Over 55 million U.S. [kids](#) are out of school for at least the next five months, with no clarity as to when they will return. As additional waves of [COVID-19](#) remain likely absent a vaccine, plans to reopen schools in the fall are tentative and uncertain. Should in person schooling return this fall, K-12 [schools](#) will likely rely on alternating days of in person and remote schooling, presenting a scheduling nightmare with cascading practical effects. This limits options for parents who rely on schools and summer childcare programs for childcare and compounds the challenge of recalling workers back to the office.

- Secure Continuity: Consider how to adjust scheduling for a workforce which lacks flexible childcare options. Establish procedures for long-term flexible work and telework options. Ensure workforce has resources necessary to work from home.

TRUSTED RESOURCES: for numbers & guidance

[Johns Hopkins University](#) – Coronavirus Resource Center

[World Health Organization](#) – COVID-19 Pandemic

[Center for Disease Control](#) – Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Please contact Secure Source International at info@securesource.com to schedule a leadership roundtable with our intelligence and security experts to dive into these topics and discuss security and safety related best-practices.