

# COVID-19 impact: Work from home more appealing than return to 'business as usual,' Harvard survey shows

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Despite potentially longer hours, most Americans enjoy working remotely and want the option to keep doing so post-pandemic, according

to a new Harvard Business School Online survey.

As COVID-19 forced countless companies to let employees work remotely and presented new challenges such as readjusting their [home life](#) and fighting Zoom fatigue from numerous virtual meetings, most of the 1,500 people surveyed say they excelled and even grew in their professions.

"I think it's a combination of factors, like a Jekyll and Hyde, so to speak," said Patrick Mullane, the school's executive director. "We love working remotely in some ways; it gives us more time to focus, spend time with our families, and no long commutes back and forth to work.

"We found out that we can do a lot without having to be face-to-face as COVID really forced that issue," Mullane said.

The survey, released on Thursday, comes as many Americans continue to work remotely more than a year after the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic and as more Americans are getting the highly-sought COVID vaccinations.

However, the survey also showed that while most employees miss their colleagues and other aspects of office life, they don't want to go back to "business as usual," as they want more flexibility doing their jobs, Mullane said.

About 81% surveyed say they either don't want to go back to the office or would prefer a hybrid schedule from now on. Mullane said 27% of employees hope to work remotely [full-time](#), and another 61% would like to work two or three days a week from home.

This mindset is going to be tricky for employers, Mullane said.

"It's hard to know how it plays out," Mullane said. "So while everyone is jazzed about remote work, there will be some challenges to work through."

Mullane also believes that most employers who adapt to a more flexible work environment may get an advantage over their competition in attracting talent.

"It could make some (companies) more successful and profitable in the long run," he said.

However, about 18% of employees say they want to go back to the office full-time. Those include workers who have kids at home, and those married, compared to those without children and single, respectively, said Michele Reynolds, who helped direct Harvard's remote worker survey.

Reynolds said while 70% of those surveyed have enjoyed spending more time with their loved ones, she added that "some may think there's too much family togetherness," as they would welcome being alongside their co-workers.

## **What should the return to the office include?**

But those surveyed also said there should be some new workplace conditions. About 51% of employees say they are uncomfortable going back to the office until they're fully vaccinated, and 71% are hesitant to go back until everyone is fully vaccinated.

Also, 54% of employees surveyed expect some form of social distancing in the office, including their colleagues being seated at least six feet apart and being required to wear masks.

"It begs the question about how employers are going to make their employees feel comfortable in office settings," Mullane said. "I'm sure there are going to be plenty of discussions with employers asking, 'How do I bring them back safely?'"

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