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National Office Report

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Return to Office Delayed Again

- In the summer of 2021, there was widespread optimism that employees could return to the office in the fall. Vaccines were being rolled out—with exceptional efficacy against breakthrough infections of the original COVID strain—case counts were falling and a return to normal seemed to be just around the corner. The delta variant threw a wrench in these plans, and the third wave of the virus caused many companies that had planned a return around Labor Day to delay into the new year. Now, the omicron variant has delayed these plans yet again. New daily case counts are at an all-time high and breakthrough infections are common, causing uncertainty for many companies' return-to-work plans.
- Wall Street banks and investment firms were more aggressive than almost any other industry with their return-to-office policies last year. However, as a wave of cases has torn through New York City, these firms have pumped the brakes. Citigroup, Bank of America and JPMorgan Chase have all reportedly told employees to work from home until the omicron wave subsides. Even Goldman Sachs, perhaps the most zealous Wall Street firm in wanting workers to be in the office, has told employees to work from home for two weeks beginning Jan. 2. To get employees back in the office, Goldman will require booster shots and regular testing. Beyond finance, a slew of companies have delayed return-to-office target dates. Uber, CNN, Meta, Ford and Chevron are just a few of the big-name companies that have delayed early 2022 plans.
- In the wake of yet another delay, many firms are now pushing back full-scale return-to-office plans indefinitely. Two tech giants—Apple and Google parent company Alphabet—are not announcing any plans for a return to the office as they wait out the latest wave of infections. Microsoft had already indefinitely delayed its return to office amidst the delta-driven wave in late summer. Lyft has announced that employees can work from home until at least the start of 2023.
- What has become clear is that when a return to office does finally happen, office utilization will look much different than it did two years ago. Some firms worry that after nearly two years of remote work, being too forceful with return directives could cause employees to quit. CBRE's Workforce Sentiment Survey revealed that 85% of workers would like to be remote at least two to three days a week, and firms seem likely to accommodate them for the most part. The Occupier Sentiment Survey showed 87% of firms will adopt a hybrid work program of some kind.

