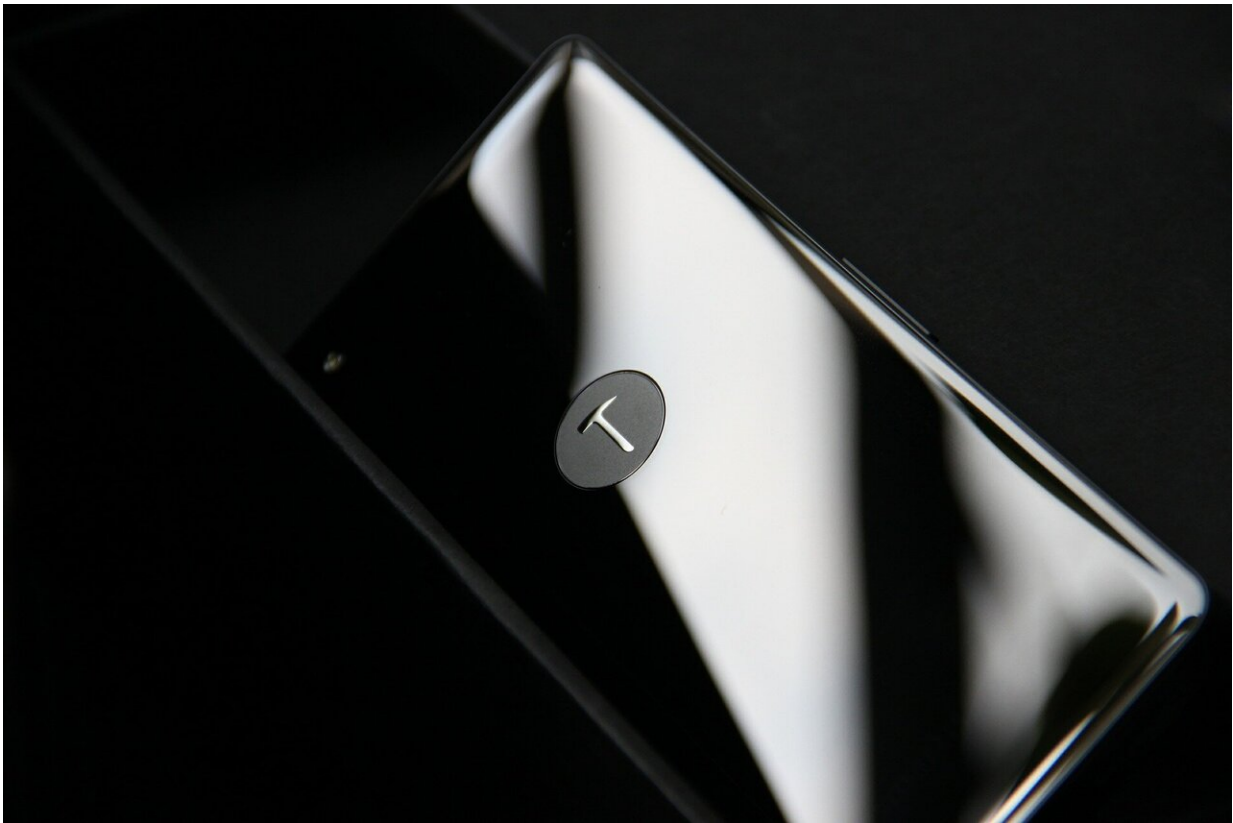


While many tech firms keep workers home, T-Mobile wants an office return by next month

September 22 2021, by Paul Roberts



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

While many employers have delayed their office returns until next year, T-Mobile is pushing ahead with plans to bring workers back at least part-time before the end of October.

Although the Bellevue, Wash.-based cellular company postponed its original return date, from Sept. 20 to Oct. 25, to give workers more time to get vaccinations, it's still urging vaccinated workers to return by the earlier date. To help returning employees feel safe, it has also limited access to its Factoria offices and other "badge-controlled" facilities to vaccinated employees.

"Because we're taking this big step to ensure your safety at our offices, I'm also urging employees to stick to our planned September 20 or earlier date for returning to the office with your flexible resident or hybrid schedule," Mike Sievert, T-Mobile CEO, said Aug. 31 in an internal email shared with The Seattle Times. "Our spaces are open and ready for you, and it is time to come back regularly."

Unvaccinated employees have until Oct. 25 to ask to keep working remotely, the company said, and those requests "will be approved based on their role and circumstances," said spokesperson Tara Darrow.

T-Mobile is developing a tool that will let employees upload vaccination documentation, which should be "in place well before" the Oct. 25 return date, Darrow said, but for now is relying on [employee](#) declarations of vaccination status.

T-Mobile's October return makes it something of a local outlier, at least among big tech firms.

Seattle-based Amazon recently pushed its office return to Jan. 3 as it continues to "closely watch conditions related to COVID-19." On Sept. 9, Microsoft said it was delaying the move indefinitely as a result of the "evolving Delta variant." The Redmond tech firm had already delayed its return from Sept. 7 to Oct. 4.

But T-Mobile appears to be convinced of the value of in-person work.

"We have found, hands-down, that we are at our best ... when we are collaborating in person at least some of the time," Sievert said.

T-Mobile's initial plans for a Sept. 20 return had led to concerns among some employees that the company was coming back too soon, given that COVID-19 cases were surging, some employees said.

Sievert appeared to address those concerns in his Aug. 31 email.

"I understand that this pandemic is far from over, but the data is crystal-clear that the vaccines are **HIGHLY** effective at preventing the kinds of infections that result in serious illness, hospitalizations, and death," Sievert said. "And limiting our physical spaces to fully vaccinated-only people further reduces the risk, because unvaccinated people comprise the vast majority of cases and serious illnesses."

T-Mobile's vaccine mandate doesn't include its retail stores, but the company will continue to require masks for unvaccinated customers and employees and is encouraging employees to get vaccinated.

By this week, many T-Mobile workers were already back at work. Matthieu Marescaux, an engineer at the company's Factoria facility, estimated that the office was around 40% full. "It's definitely increased," he said. "But it's not 100%—far from that."

T-Mobile's October office return will be welcome news to [small business](#) near the Factoria headquarters.

At nearby Spotless Cleaners, which had relied on T-Mobile [office](#) workers for much of its pre-COVID-19 business, proprietor Boon Seo has seen a slight increase in business from T-Mobile employees in the last week.

"Business is a little bit better," said Boon. "Better than last month."

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Citation: While many tech firms keep workers home, T-Mobile wants an office return by next month (2021, September 22) retrieved 8 May 2024 from

<https://techxplore.com/news/2021-09-tech-firms-workers-home-t-mobile.html>

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