CDC Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CDC 24/7: Saving Lives, Protecting People™

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

COVID-19 Employer Information for Office Buildings

Workers in office buildings may be at risk for exposure to the virus that causes coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Office building employers, building owners and managers, and building operations specialists can take steps to create a safe and healthy workplace and protect workers and clients.

Create a COVID-19 workplace health and safety plan.

- Start by reviewing the CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers. This will provide guidelines and recommendations that all employers can use to protect their workers and clients.

Before resuming business operations, check the building to see if it's ready for occupancy.

- Ensure that ventilation systems in your facility operate properly. For building heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC systems) that have been shut down or on setback, review new construction start-up guidance provided in ASHRAE Standard 180-2018, Standard Practice for the Inspection and Maintenance of Commercial Building HVAC Systems 🔗 .

- Increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, and other methods. Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety or health risk for current or subsequent occupants, including children (e.g., allowing outdoor environmental contaminants including carbon monoxide, molds, or pollens into the building).

- Evaluate the building and its mechanical and life safety systems to determine if the building is ready for occupancy. Check for hazards associated with prolonged facility shutdown such as mold growth 🔗 , rodents or pests 🔗 , or issues with stagnant water systems, and take appropriate remedial actions.

Identify where and how workers might be exposed to COVID-19 at work.

Employers are responsible for providing a safe and healthy workplace 🔗 .

- Conduct a thorough hazard assessment 🔗 of the workplace to identify potential workplace hazards that could increase risks for COVID-19 transmission.

- Identify work and common areas where employees could have close contact (within 6 feet) with others — for example meeting rooms, break rooms, the cafeteria, locker rooms, check-in areas, waiting areas, and routes of entry and exit.

- Include all employees in the workplace in communication plans — for example management, staff, utility employees, relief employees, janitorial staff, maintenance staff, and supervisory staff.

- If contractors are employed in the workplace, develop plans to communicate with the contracting company regarding modifications to work processes and requirements for the contractors to prevent transmission of COVID-19.

Develop hazard controls using the hierarchy of controls to reduce transmission among workers. Include a combination of controls noted below.

Engineering controls: Isolate workers from the hazard

- Modify or adjust seats, furniture, and workstations 📄 🔗 to maintain social distancing of 6 feet between employees.
    - Install transparent shields or other physical barriers where possible to separate employees and visitors where social distancing is not an option.
    - Arrange reception or other communal seating area chairs by turning, draping (covering chair with tape or fabric so seats cannot be used), spacing, or removing chairs to maintain social distancing.

- Use methods to physically separate employees in all areas of the facilities including work areas and other areas such as meeting rooms, break rooms, parking lots, entrance and exit areas, and locker rooms.
    - Use signs, tape marks, or other visual cues such as decals or colored tape on the floor, placed 6 feet apart, to indicate where to stand when physical barriers are not possible.
    - Replace high-touch communal items, such as coffee pots, water coolers, and bulk snacks, with alternatives such as pre-packaged, single-serving items.

- Take steps to improve ventilation in the building:
    - Increase the percentage of outdoor air (e.g., using economizer modes of HVAC operations) potentially as high as 100% (first verify compatibility with HVAC system capabilities for both temperature and humidity control as well as compatibility with outdoor/indoor air quality considerations).
    - Increase total airflow supply to occupied spaces, if possible.
    - Disable demand-control ventilation (DCV) controls that reduce air supply based on temperature or occupancy.
    - Consider using natural ventilation (i.e., opening windows if possible and safe to do so) to increase outdoor air dilution of indoor air when environmental conditions and building requirements allow.
    - Improve central air filtration:
        - Increase air filtration 🔗 to as high as possible (MERV 13 or 14) without significantly diminishing design airflow.
        - Inspect filter housing and racks to ensure appropriate filter fit and check for ways to minimize filter bypass
    - Consider running the building ventilation system even during unoccupied times to maximize dilution ventilation.
    - Generate clean-to-less-clean air movement 📄 🔗 by re-evaluating the positioning of supply and exhaust air diffusers and/or dampers and adjusting zone supply and exhaust flow rates to establish measurable pressure differentials. Have staff work in areas served by "clean" ventilation zones that do not include higher-risk areas such as visitor reception or exercise facilities (if open).
- Consider using portable high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) fan/filtration systems to help enhance air cleaning 📄 🔗 (especially in higher risk areas).
- Ensure exhaust fans in restroom facilities are functional and operating at full capacity when the building is occupied.
- Consider using ultraviolet germicidal irradiation (UVGI) 📄 🔗 as a supplement to help inactivate the virus.

Administrative controls: Change the way people work

- Actively encourage employees who have symptoms of COVID-19 or who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 to notify their supervisor and stay home.

- Employees who appear to have symptoms upon arrival at work or who become sick during the day should immediately be separated from others, provided a face mask if they are not using one, and sent home with instructions and guidance on how to follow-up with their health care professional.
- Sick employees should follow CDC-recommended steps. Employees should not return to work until the criteria to discontinue home isolation are met, in consultation with their healthcare provider.
- Perform enhanced cleaning and disinfection after anyone suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 has been in the workplace.

- Consider conducting daily in-person or virtual health checks (e.g., symptoms and/or temperature screening) of employees before they enter the work site.

  - See CDC's COVID-19 General Business FAQs for guidance on how to safely conduct employee screening.
  - Develop and implement a policy to prevent employees from congregating in groups while waiting for screening, and maintain a 6-foot separation between employees.

- Stagger shifts, start times, and break times as feasible to reduce the density of employees in common areas such as screening areas, break rooms, and locker rooms.
- Consider posting signs in parking areas and entrances that ask guests and visitors to phone from their cars to inform the administration or security when they reach the facility.
  - Provide directions for visitors to enter the building at staggered times.
- Consider posting signs in parking areas and entrances that ask guests and visitors to wear cloth face coverings if possible, to not enter the building if they are sick, and to stay 6 feet away from employees, if possible.
- Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces
  - Follow the Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting to develop, follow, and maintain a plan to perform regular cleanings to reduce the risk of people's exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19 on surfaces.
  - Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, keyboards, telephones, handrails, printer/copiers, drinking fountains, and doorknobs.
    - If hard surfaces are visibly soiled (dirty), clean them using a detergent or soap and water before you disinfect them.
    - For disinfection, most common, EPA-registered, household disinfectants should be effective as well as diluted household bleach solutions or alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol. A list of products that are EPA-approved for use against the virus that causes COVID-19 ⧉ is available on the EPA website. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method, and contact time).
  - Provide employees with disposable wipes and other cleaning materials so that they can properly wipe down frequently touched surfaces before each use.
- Provide employees adequate time to wash their hands and access to soap, clean water, and single use paper towels.
  - Remind employees to wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, they should use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Establish policies and practices for social distancing:
  - Remind employees that people may be able to spread COVID-19 even if they do not show symptoms. Consider all close interactions (within 6 feet) with employees, clients, and others as a potential source of exposure.
  - Prohibit handshaking, hugs, and fist bumps.
  - Limit use and occupancy of elevators to maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet.
  - Encourage the use of outdoor seating areas and social distancing for any small group activities such as lunches, breaks, and meetings.

- For employees who commute to work using public transportation or ride sharing, consider offering the following support:
  - Offer employees incentives to use forms of transportation that minimize close contact with others, such as offering reimbursement for parking for commuting to work alone or single-occupancy rides.
  - Allow employees to shift their hours so they can commute during less busy times.
  - Ask employees to wash their hands as soon as possible after their trip.
- Post signs and reminders at entrances and in strategic places providing instruction on hand hygiene, COVID-19 symptoms, and cough and sneeze etiquette. This should include signs for non-English speakers, as needed.
- Use no-touch waste receptacles when possible.
- Remind employees to avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Employees should wear a cloth face covering to cover their nose and mouth in all areas of the business.
- CDC recommends wearing a cloth face covering as a measure to contain the wearer's respiratory droplets and help protect their co-workers and members of the general public. Employees should not wear cloth face coverings at work if they have trouble breathing, any inability to tolerate wearing it, or if they are unable to remove it without assistance.
  - Cloth face coverings are not considered personal protective equipment. They may prevent workers, including those who don't know they have the virus, from spreading it to others but may not protect the wearers from exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19.
  - Remind employees and clients that CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, **especially** in areas of significant community-based transmission. Wearing a cloth face covering, however, does not replace the need to practice social distancing.

Educate employees and supervisors about steps they can take to protect themselves at work.

- Communication and training should be easy to understand, be in preferred languages spoken or read by the employees, and include accurate and timely information. Topics should include signs and symptoms of infection, staying home when ill, social distancing, personal protective equipment, hand hygiene practices, and identifying and minimizing potential routes of transmission at work, at home, and in the community. Other topics may be considered based on local context and need.
- CDC has free, simple posters available to download and print, some of which are translated into different languages.
- Provide information and training on what actions employees should take when they are not feeling well (e.g., workplace leave policies, local and state health department information).

Take actions to maintain a healthy work environment for your employees and clients.

Read the CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to learn about more recommendations for creating new sick leave policies, cleaning, and employee communication policies to help protect your workers and clients.

Where can I get more information?

You, as the employer, are responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns and informing employees of the hazards in your workplace. You can use these additional sources for more information on reducing the risk of exposures to COVID-19 at work:

- CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers (COVID-19)
- CDC General Business Frequently Asked Questions
- NIOSH COVID-19 Workplace Safety and Health Topic

- CDC COVID-19
- OSHA COVID-19 ⤷
- OSHA Guidelines on Preparing Workplaces for COVID ⬛ ⤷
- AIHA Reopening: Guidance for General Office Settings ⬛ ⤷
- Building Owners & Managers Association International (BOMA): Getting Back to Work: Preparing Buildings for Re-Entry Amid COVID-19 ⬛ ⤷
- CDCINFO: 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) | TTY: 1-888-232-6348 | website: cdc.gov/info

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