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Insights

U.S. COVID-19: BACK TO WORK - CDC GUIDANCE FOR REOPENING OFFICE BUILDINGS

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As states continue to move through the reopening process, employers, building owners, and building managers are beginning to allow non-essential office workspaces to reopen. Most states - and in some cases, counties and municipalities - have issued specific guidance and requirements that office workspace employers, as well as office building owners and management companies, need to comply with. On May 28, 2020, the CDC issued its own set of guidelines for office buildings, which creates a minimum set of requirements that businesses should comply with whenever possible, even if they are not required under relevant state or local orders.

The following chart provides a summary of the key provisions. It is important to note that some aspects of the guidance are applicable to building owners and property managers, some are applicable to employers, and some are applicable to both, so we have organized this information based on the groups that are responsible for each task. In addition, this is a summary, not a complete list of every detail contained in the CDC Guidance, so businesses should conduct their own review, adapt the guidance to their specific circumstances, and consult with counsel where appropriate prior to reopening.

Key

Plan components relevant to employers

Plan components relevant to building owners/property managers

Create a COVID-19 Workplace Health and Safety Plan	
Plan Requirements	• Specific to the workplace • Identifies all areas and job tasks that create potential COVID-19 exposure

	• Includes control measures to eliminate or reduce exposures
Best Practices	• This should be a formal, written plan • Provide training to employees on the specifics of the plan

Building Preparedness	

Property Owners/Management Companies	• Ensure that HVAC and any other ventilation systems work properly
	
	• Increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible
	
	• Evaluate and correct any hazards created by prolonged facility shutdown:
	  • Mold growth
	
	  • Rodents or pests
	
	  • Bacteria (specifically legionella) and other issues associated with stagnant water systems

Best Practices	• When considering how to increase circulation of outdoor air be aware of potential health risks posed by outdoor air contaminants (e.g. pollen, carbon monoxide, etc.)

Worker Hazard Assessment	
Hazard Assessment Considerations	• Identify work and common areas where employees could have close contact with others, including customers • Include all employees in hazard assessment considerations, and in communication plans • If contractors are employed in the workplace, include them in the hazard assessment, and in communication plans
Property Owners/Management Companies (Multi-Tenant Office Buildings)	• While the recommendations in this area apply to employers, property owners and management companies, especially those managing multi-tenant facilities, should consider these guidelines as though applicable to building occupants and how to implement them, such as the identification of common areas in buildings where occupants may come into close contact (within 6 feet) such as routes of entry and excess into the building and revising requirements for

	contractors entering the building to prevent the transmission of COVID-19
Engineering Controls: Physical Distancing	
Modified Workstations and Other Office Areas	- Install transparent shields between visitors and employees where distancing is not an option - Rearrange or block off seating in reception areas to ensure proper distancing - Use methods to physically separate employees in all areas of the facility including meeting rooms, break rooms, parking lots, entrance and exit areas, and locker rooms - Use signs, tape marks, or other visual cues to direct distancing where physical barriers aren't possible - Replace high-touch communal items like coffee pots, water coolers, and bulk snacks with pre-packaged, single-serving items - Switch to no-touch waste receptacles where possible
Modified Building Common Areas (Multi-Tenant Office Buildings)	- Rearrange or block off seating in common area lobbies to ensure proper distancing - Use methods to physically separate occupants and visitors in building common areas including communal meeting rooms, parking lots, and entrance and exit areas - Use signs, tape marks, or other visual cues to direct distancing where physical barriers aren't possible - Switch to no-touch waste receptacles where possible
Increased Ventilation and Filters	- Increase the percentage of outdoor air as much as 100% depending on system parameters - Increase total airflow supply to occupied spaces, and disable demand-control ventilation controls that reduce air supply based on temperature or occupancy - Improve central air filtration as much as possible without significantly diminishing airflow, and inspect the filters to ensure that they are installed and operating property

	• Redirect airflow to increase clean-to-less-clean air movement • Ensure restroom exhaust fans are operating at full capacity whenever the building is occupied • Consider running building ventilation systems even when the building is unoccupied • Consider using portable HEPA fan/filtration systems • Consider using ultraviolet germicidal irradiation as a supplement to help inactivate the virus
Best Practices	• Physical distancing is almost always required under state and local orders, and should be a major focus of businesses reopening plans • In addition to the high-touch food and beverage items called out in the guidance, consider other high-touch items as well, such as staplers, shared phones, copy machines, pens, electronic building directories etc.
Administrative Controls: Workforce Modification	

Staying Home When Ill	• Employers should actively encourage employees who have COVID-19 symptoms, or who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 to notify their supervisor and stay at home
	
	• Employees who have symptoms when they arrive, or develop them during the day should be immediately separated from others, provided with a face mask, and sent home with instructions on how to follow up with their health care professional
	
	• Sick employees should not return to work until either:
	  • They have had no fever for three days, symptoms have improved, and it has been at least ten days since symptoms first appeared, or
	
	  • It has been at least ten days since the employee tested positive for the virus

Daily Health Checks	• Consider daily in-person or virtual health checks before employees enter the workplace • Symptom checks

	- Temperature screening - Regardless of which method(s) are used, employers must ensure: - That employees maintain 6 feet of separation while waiting in line for, and conducting the screening - Maintain confidentiality and protect employees personal medical information
Changes in staffing and workforce	- Stagger shifts, start times, and breaks to reduce employee density in common areas - Provide signs and waiting areas in parking areas asking guests and visitors to remain in their cars and call the facility to be escorted in - Also post signs notifying visitors to wear a cloth face covering, to not enter the building if they are ill, and to maintain 6 feet of distance from all employees and other guests
Cleaning, Disinfection, and Personal Hygiene	- Regularly clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces, including: - Workstations - Keyboards - Telephones - Handrails - Printers/copiers - Drinking fountains (if they are allowed under local orders) - Doorknobs - Light switches - Use EPA-approved disinfection products - Provide employees with disposable wipes and other cleaning materials

	- Provide employees with adequate time to wash their hands, as well as access to soap, clean water, and single use paper towels
	   - If soap and water are not available, provide hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol
	
	- Post signs and reminders and entrances and other strategic areas with instructions on hand hygiene, COVID-19 symptoms, and cough and sneeze etiquette
	   - Signs should be provided for non-English speakers as needed

Social Distancing Policies	- Prohibit handshakes, hugs, and fist bumps - Limit use and occupancy of elevators to maintain 6 foot social distancing - Encourage the use of outdoor seating areas and social distancing for small group activities (e.g. lunches, breaks, meetings)
Commuting by Public Transit and Rideshare	- If possible, offer incentives for using forms of transportation that minimize close contact with others (e.g. biking, walking, driving or riding by car alone or with household members) - Ask employees to follow CDC guidance on protecting themselves when using transportation - Allow employees to adjust their hours so they can commute during less busy times - Ask employees to wash their hands as soon as possible after their trip
Face Coverings	- Employees should wear a cloth face covering over their nose and mouth in all areas of the business - Employees should not wear a face covering if they have trouble breathing, any inability to tolerate wearing it, or if they are unable to remove it without assistance
Property Owners/Management Companies (Multi-	- While the recommendations in this area apply to employers, property owners and management companies, especially those managing multi-tenant facilities, should consider whether any of the guidelines might be appropriate to apply in the context of building occupants,

Tenant Office Buildings)	such as implementing social distancing and face covering guidelines in multi-tenant elevators and other common areas, cleaning protocols for common areas and signage and hand sanitizer stations in the common areas
	▪ Property owners and management companies must evaluate closely those aspects of the CDC Guidance that are best left to their tenants because they fall within the purview of the employer-employee relationship and those aspects of CDC Guidance that should fall to the property owner and its manager
Best Practices	▪ Elevators are confined spaces that create particular social distancing and disinfection challenges, and so the use of frequent medical grade cleaning and taped off standing spaces that are 6 feet apart, as well as arrows and signs which limit the maximum number of occupants and encourage occupants to face away from each other may be employed to achieve the CDC Guidance
Educating Employees	

How to Deliver Educational Messages Regarding COVID	▪ Communication and training should be easy to understand and provided in employees' preferred languages
	
	▪ Topics should include:
	  ▪ Signs and symptoms of infection
	
	  ▪ Staying home when ill, and when it is safe to return to work
	
	  ▪ Social distancing
	
	  ▪ Personal protective equipment and cloth face coverings
	
	  ▪ Hand hygiene
	
	  ▪ Identifying and minimizing potential routes of transmission at work, at home, and in the community
	
	  ▪ What actions employees should take when they aren't feeling well, and what resources are available through the employer (e.g. workplace leave policies)

As employers, building owners, and building managers navigate the return to work process, they will need to be nimble in adapting to the demands of protecting workers and guests from COVID-19 exposure. The CDC, state and local authorities have continued to evolve their guidelines as scientists discover more about this disease, and as various jurisdictions grapple with balancing the progression of this disease through their communities with economic needs. Our teams are actively monitoring all of these changes and advising our client on reopening plans, and we would be happy to discuss any specific questions that you might have.

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