

# Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)



## COVID-19 Employer Information for Office Buildings

Updated Oct. 29, 2020

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, office building employers, owners and managers, and operations specialists can take the following steps to create a safe and healthy workplace for workers and clients.

### How You Can Protect Your Staff and Others and Slow the Spread


#### Create a COVID-19 workplace health and safety plan.


- Start by reviewing the [CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#).

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

- 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.
- 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 startup 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 if possible, and using fans. Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety or health risk for occupants, including children (e.g., a risk of falling or of breathing outdoor environmental contaminants such as carbon monoxide, molds, or pollens).
- To minimize the risk of [Legionnaires' disease](#) and other diseases associated with water, [take steps](#) to ensure that all water systems and features (e.g., sink faucets, drinking fountains, decorative fountains) and water-using devices (e.g., ice machines, cooling towers) are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown.



## 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 communication plans — for example, management, staff, utility employees, relief employees, janitorial staff, and maintenance staff.
- If contractors are employed in the workplace, develop plans to communicate with the contracting company about changes 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. Use 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, where possible.
  - Install transparent shields or other physical barriers where possible to separate employees and visitors where social distancing is not an option.
  - Arrange chairs in reception or other communal seating areas 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 building, 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 show where to stand when physical barriers are not possible.
  - Replace high-touch communal items, such as coffee pots and bulk snacks, with alternatives such as pre-packaged, single-serving items. Encourage staff to bring their own water to minimize use and touching of water fountains or consider installing no-touch activation methods for water fountains.
- Consider taking steps to improve ventilation in the building, in consultation with an HVAC professional, based on local environmental conditions (temperature/humidity) and ongoing community transmission in the area:
  - 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 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 HVAC system at maximum outside airflow for 2 hours before and after occupied times, in accordance with [industry standards](#) .
- [Generate clean-to-less-clean air movements](#)   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 “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 supplemental technique to inactivate potential airborne virus in the [upper-room](#) air of common occupied spaces, in accordance with industry guidelines.

*Administrative controls: Change the way people work*

- 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](#) when they arrive 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 healthcare provider.
  - Sick employees should follow [CDC-recommended steps](#). Employees should not return to work until they meet the criteria to [discontinue home isolation](#), 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 gathering in groups while waiting for screening, and maintain a 6-foot separation between employees.
  - Alternatively, consider having employees perform self-checks at home before

heading to the office.

- Stagger shifts, start times, and break times as feasible to reduce the number 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 of surfaces to reduce the risk of people's exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19.
  - At least daily, clean and disinfect all surfaces that are frequently touched by multiple people, such as door handles, desks, light switches, faucets, toilets, workstations, keyboards, telephones, handrails, printer/copiers, and drinking fountains. More frequent cleaning and disinfection may be required based on level of use.
    - If hard surfaces are dirty, clean them using a detergent or soap and water before you disinfect them.
    - Disinfect using [products that are EPA-approved for use against the virus that causes COVID-19](#) . Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method, and contact time).
    - When [EPA-approved disinfectants](#)  are not available, [alternative disinfectants](#) can be used (for example, 1/3 cup of 5.25-8.25% bleach added to 1 gallon of room temperature water, or 70% alcohol solutions).
      - Prepare fresh bleach solutions daily.
      - Do not mix bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. This can cause fumes that may be very dangerous to breathe in.
    - Read [EPA's infographic on how to use these disinfectant products](#)  safely and effectively.
    - Keep all disinfectants out of the reach of children.
  - Give employees enough time to wash and dry their hands and provide accessible sinks, soap, water, and a way to dry their hands (e.g., paper towels, hand dryer).
    - 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.

- Discourage handshaking, hugs, and fist bumps.
- 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:
  - If feasible, offer employees incentives to use forms of transportation that minimize close contact with others (e.g., biking, walking, driving or riding by car either alone or with household members).
  - Ask employees to follow the CDC guidance on how to [protect yourself when using transportation](#).
  - 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 instructions and reminders](#) at entrances and in strategic places on [hand hygiene](#), [COVID-19 symptoms](#), wearing [cloth face coverings](#), and [cough and sneeze etiquette](#). This should include signs for non-English speakers, as needed.
- Use no-touch trash cans when possible.
- Remind employees to avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth.

## 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, cloth face coverings, hand hygiene practices, and identifying and minimizing potential routes of transmission at work, at home, and in the community.
- 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).
- CDC recommends wearing a cloth face covering as a measure to contain the wearer's respiratory droplets and help protect others. Employees should not wear a cloth face covering if they have trouble breathing, cannot tolerate wearing it, or can't remove it without help.
  - Cloth face coverings are not considered personal protective equipment and may not protect the wearers from exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19. However, cloth face coverings may prevent workers, including those who don't know they have the virus, from spreading it to others.
  - Remind employees and clients that CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are hard 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.

## Develop Special Considerations for Elevators and Escalators

- Encourage occupants to take stairs when possible, especially when elevator lobbies are crowded or when only going a few flights.
- Where feasible, designate certain stairwells or sides of stairwells as “up” and “down” to better promote social distancing.
- Use floor markings in elevator lobbies and near the entrance to escalators to reinforce social distancing. Place decals inside the elevator to identify where passengers should stand, if needed.
- Use stanchions (for lobbies only; not inside elevators) or other ways to mark pathways to help people travel in one direction and stay 6 feet apart.
- Encourage the use of cloth face coverings by all elevator and escalator occupants. Ask elevator occupants to avoid speaking, when possible.
- Consider limiting the number of people in an elevator and leaving steps empty between passengers on escalators, where possible, to maintain social distancing.
- Post signs reminding occupants to minimize surface touching. They should use an object (such as a pen cap) or their knuckle to push elevator buttons.
- Encourage elevator and escalator passengers to wash their hands and avoid touching their face after holding on to handrails or touching buttons.
- Consider adding supplemental air ventilation or local air treatment devices in frequently used elevator cars.

## 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.













### Protect Your Health This Flu Season

**Essential workers:** protect yourself from flu this fall and winter with a flu vaccine. While getting a flu vaccine will not protect against COVID-19, it can protect you from becoming sick with flu and needing medical care. Flu is another serious respiratory illness that can cause missed work, hospitalizations, and, in some cases, even death. The combination of flu and COVID-19 could overwhelm healthcare settings.

[Protect yourself, your family, and your community by getting a flu vaccine.](#)

## 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](#)  
- [OSHA Guidance on Returning to Work](#)  
- [AIHA Reopening: Guidance for General Office Settings](#)  
- [ASHRAE Recommendations for commercial buildings under epidemic conditions](#) 
- [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](https://www.cdc.gov/info)

Last Updated Oct. 29, 2020

Content source: [National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases \(NCIRD\), Division of Viral Diseases](#)