

Creating a Safe Environment for Employees

BACK TO WORK

As state officials move to relax lockdown restrictions, restart the economy, and reopen businesses, safety is paramount in protecting employees as well as customers.



Reopening & Transition: Roadmap

Business reopenings are underway, with several states and companies making the move to kick-start the economy as coronavirus restrictions are slowly lifted. For example, in South Carolina, stores will open at 20% capacity, or five people per 1,000 square feet. Tennessee is planning to allow the vast majority of the state's businesses to reopen on May 1. Georgia is in the process of restarting the economy, with gyms, hair salons, bowling alleys, and tattoo parlors reopening as long as owners follow strict social distancing and hygiene requirements. Alaska announced intentions to relax some of the state's restrictions, allowing some businesses – such as restaurants and hair salons – to reopen early May.



New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut have already allowed boatyards and marinas to reopen for personal use. A joint statement from the states' governors said that marinas, boatyards, and marine manufacturers will need to implement social distancing and social protocols to remain open.

In California, lawmakers are part of a multistate task force with Oregon and Washington on reopening businesses with several restrictions taking place throughout the summer.

You can find the most current information on each of the 50 states' plans to reopen along with continued proposed restrictions [here](#).

Companies like Boeing announced plans to put about 27,000 people back to work building passenger jets at its Seattle-area plants. Farm equipment maker and North Dakota's largest manufacturer, Doosan Bobcat, recently announced the return of about 2,200 workers at three factories around the state.

Slowly but surely, the country is entering a new phase to make its way back to the future.

Moving Ahead Safely

Depending on the timeline of each state's reopening plan and based on the type of businesses that will be allowed to reopen their doors, there are specific measures and precautions that companies should have in place to help keep their employees and customers safe. Getting our economy back on track and employees on the job means having a healthy workforce and doing everything possible to prevent the further spread of COVID-19.

In this whitepaper, "Back to Work," we have provided general measures that all businesses should be implementing as they reopen or shift from remote to office work, as well as some industry-specific recommendations to effectively balance reopening with a safe environment.

Working Amid COVID-19: Safety First

There are a number of general virus-slowing precautions all businesses should implement when reopening or making the transition from remote to in-office work to help minimize exposure to COVID-19.

- Reinforce OSHA guidelines in preventing occupational exposure to the coronavirus for all employees:
 - Frequently wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. When soap and running water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand rub with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands that are visibly soiled.
 - Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
 - Practice good respiratory etiquette, including covering coughs and sneezes by directing them into the elbow (not the hands).
 - Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
 - Report anyone with whom you may have come into contact who's infected with COVID-19.
 - Stay home if sick.
- Make masks available for employees to wear in common areas, such as conference rooms, lobbies, restrooms, lunchrooms and cafeterias, etc.
- Consider employee temperature screening. NOTE: Temperature checks normally constitute an overly broad medical exam under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (because the exam is not "job-related and consistent with business necessity") as well as various state non-discrimination laws, which carry separate penalties. However, as of March 19, 2020, the EEOC issued updated guidance specifically concerning COVID-19, the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act. With regard to temperature checks, the EEOC indicates: "If pandemic influenza symptoms become more severe than the seasonal flu or the H1N1 virus in the spring/summer of 2009, or if pandemic influenza becomes widespread in the community as assessed by state or local health authorities or the CDC, then employers may measure employees' body temperature." In implementing a temperature screening program, it is necessary to 1) establish a consistent process for conducting such checks; 2) mitigate the risk that someone excluded by a temperature check will bring a claim; and 3) assess any other considerations that should weigh into the decision, such as public health.¹
- Put sanitizing hand rub dispensers in prominent places around the workplace. Make sure these dispensers are regularly refilled. Ask the property manager to add a hand sanitizer dispenser in the building's lobby.
- Display posters promoting hand washing – ask your local public health authority for these or look on www.WHO.int.
- To the extent possible, close or restrict break rooms and cafeterias and/or rotate the use of the break room or cafeteria.
- Reinforce social distancing and increase physical distancing between people to six feet within your office. Maintaining six-foot social distancing remains important to slowing the spread of the virus.



- Prohibit employees from using other workers' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment, wherever possible, and clean and disinfect equipment before and after use.
- Where possible, increase the amount of outdoor air and ventilation that circulates throughout the workplace.
- If possible, consider phasing in employees to limit the number of people on the premises and ease them back to office life after a prolonged period of remote work or sequestering at home.



COVID-19 brings about a shift away from open office spaces where you could see many of your coworkers with little separation between each employee to the creation of more private spaces or personal offices for individuals, and more distance between desks. A conference room that typically fits 10 people might now only hold chairs for five. Expect greater spacing and fewer seating options in communal areas like kitchens as well.² New technology could also provide access to offices and elevators without employees having to touch a handle or press a button.

In fact, one global real estate services firm in the wake of COVID-19 created a conceptual idea called the [Six Feet Office Project](#) to help employers create a safe and healthy workplace.

Coronavirus Industry-Specific Precautionary Safety Measures

We have provided additional safety recommendations for several industry-specific businesses to employ to help them create and maintain a safe environment (some recommendations overlap with the measures previously discussed).

Manufacturers

- Establish flexible work hours and stagger shifts if feasible.
- Minimize the number of employees on the plant floor at any given time.
- Maintain distances of six feet between employees if possible.
- Allow workers to wear facemasks or plastic face shields to prevent spread of the virus.
- Provide training on the proper donning, doffing, and cleaning (if appropriate) of personal protective equipment and clothing.
- Promote personal hygiene and provide alcohol-based hand rubs of at least 60% alcohol if hand-washing access is not available.
- Provide disinfectants and disposable towels for employees to clean work surfaces, according to OSHA guidelines.
- Consider employee temperature screening.
- Use EPA-approved cleaning products from this [list of disinfectants](#) for use against COVID-19, or any that have label claims against the coronavirus.
- Encourage workers to report any safety and health concerns.



Hotels

For Employees

- Provide staff members with masks as part of their uniform.
- Have housekeeping staff wear disposable gloves whenever working.
- Perform check-ins and check-outs virtually.
- Provide front-desk employees with disinfectant wipes that can be used to clean their workspace between customers.
- Advise staff to practice social distancing, remaining at least six feet from guests and other workers.



For Guests

- Rearrange furniture in public areas to promote social distancing.
- Use CDC-recommended or EPA-approved electrostatic sprayers with hospital-grade disinfectants to sanitize throughout the hotel, including guest rooms, lobbies, gyms and other public areas. (Marriott International recently announced that it will be doing so at each of their properties.)
- Disinfect light switches, elevator buttons, doors, and door handles, phone receivers and toilet seats more frequently.
- Sanitize room keys.
- Add hand sanitizer stations and signs in the lobby to remind anyone who enters to keep their distance from others.
- Spray rooms after every guest visit.
- Remove minibars, excess hangers, excess linens and pillows in guest rooms.

- Limit the number of guests in the lobby, elevators and other common areas.
- Mandate and monitor regularly scheduled hand washing for employees handling food.
- Change food service protocols and consider replacing buffet-style service with bagged meals; discontinue room service.
- Have windows and doors open as much as possible to encourage airflow.

Hair Salons

- Consider staggering appointments so that waiting areas have minimal congestion.
- Consider online scheduling in place of written appointment cards.
- Rearrange salon furnishings to spread everything further apart to accommodate social distancing.
- Have employees wear masks.
- Use paper capes or smocks instead of those requiring washing.
- Consider adding touchless, automatic hand sanitizer dispensers.
- Get rid of magazines and all other non-essential items in the waiting area that cannot be disinfected.
- Wipe down all soft surfaces (couches, chairs) with water and a clean towel; remember that these soft surfaces cannot be disinfected.
- Clean and disinfect all hard, non-porous surfaces such as the reception counter, computer keyboard, phones, door handles, light switches and point of sale equipment.
- Clean and disinfect all shelving, glass and display cases; keep product containers clean and dust free.
- Clean and disinfect stations, rolling carts, drawers and any containers used for storage.



Construction

- Review and adjust project schedules to allow for social distancing, including employing a staggered work schedule and extra shifts to physically separate employees working on site.
- Provide employees with an adequate supply of personal protective equipment, including but not limited to masks, gloves and hand sanitizer.
- Clean portable bathrooms on job sites no less than every two days.
- Require employees to travel separately.
- Rotate lunch and coffee break shifts for crew.
- Eliminate coffee and lunch trucks and use of centralized gathering or eating areas. Advise employees to bring their own food, drinks, and utensils.
- Follow the CDC social-distancing guidelines during meals or breaks.



We are entering new territory as we make the transition back to business. Be sure to take a thorough approach to assessing and addressing workplace risks with the proper safety measures throughout the COVID-19 crisis. This includes making sure that prior to getting back to business that the workplace is evaluated to ensure it's safe. Check equipment and environment for readiness and adhere to any cleaning or compliance guidelines. In addition, document all decision-making, infection-control precautions and response actions to protect the safety and health of employees and customers.

In addition, be sure to work with an attorney and HR in establishing COVID-19 safety and health policies.

Sources:

¹Little, OSHA, WHO, CDC, ²Vox, New York Times, Hotel News Now, NFSA



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