

# Critical Steps to Safely Reopen the Workplace



## A Checklist for Office Landlords, Facility Managers & Cleaning Staff

With federal guidelines in place now allowing for phased reopening of businesses around the nation, people are beginning to think about returning to work—and all the risks entailed. To help reduce employees' fears about returning to the workplace, employers must put clear steps in place to provide a safe environment and communicate those steps taken to staff and the traveling public.

Meeting all relevant guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention will take time, resources and a commitment from cleaning staff. To be successful, workplaces must address both immediate needs and plan for a new normal in the long term. In both instances, it will be essential to put strategies in place that support cleaning staff in terms of efficiency and morale to see that these policies are implemented.

The following four sections draw upon official federal guidance and suggestions from industry leaders and innovators to help you prioritize a multi-pronged effort to reduce infection and increase employee confidence.

### I. Focus on clear communication

- Identify state and local authority in charge of reopening.** Federal guidelines outline procedures for localities to follow, but each city and town will have its own timeline and precautions in place. If possible, sign up for alerts on your local government website.
- Contact suppliers.** Reach out to your vendors to determine availability of EPA-registered disinfectants and any necessary personal protective equipment for cleaning. If you don't already have backup vendors in place, now is the time to reach out to additional suppliers.
- Work with HR to outline staff processes.**

These may include:

- **Social distancing requirements.** In addition to requiring face masks, consider protocols for keeping employees 6 feet apart from one another. Support this with signage that outlines social distancing policies.
- **Sick day policies that encourage sick workers to stay home.** Review your sick leave policy and ensure it is in accordance with all state and federal laws. [Per the CDC](#), if you do not have a sick leave policy in place, consider drafting non-punitive "emergency sick leave" policies.
- **Modified shifts.** Minimize the number of staff in the space when possible. Reexamine scheduling as well as work from home policies, flextime and alternative workweeks.

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- **Strategies to improve cleaning staff efficiency.** Create clear retention and support policies to support workers who are being tasked with doing more deep cleaning than in the past. Automating certain simple tasks, for example, will allow cleaning staff to focus on more value-added activities.

☑ **Host training for cleaning staff.** Training to reduce infection risks should be provided for all new janitorial staff and returning staff on an ongoing basis. Consider hosting the first session virtually to address employees' questions and set expectations. Training should include:

- Expectations for appropriate hand hygiene, including more frequent hand washing.
- When and how to use personal protective equipment, including face masks and gloves.
- Clarifying the chain of command for addressing concerns about infection or cleaning practices.

☑ **Communicate cleanliness procedures to building occupants.** Expectations surrounding cleanliness will be incredibly high for workers, and they will want to see evidence of increased disinfection and sanitization in the workplace. Consider the following:

- Appoint a cleanliness manager who can address corporate hygiene-related questions.
- Provide the workforce with detailed information on your cleaning plan and data on cleaning consistency.
- Establish signage in common areas that detail cleaning practices or a "last cleaned" time.
- Post signage in high-traffic areas, including front lobbies and bathrooms that promote ways to stop the spread of germs, including properly washing hands and how to wear a face covering.

**Engage employees in cleaning personal spaces.** Educate employees on the importance of leaving personal items at home to reduce the possibility of infection. Create signage that indicates employees' responsibility for cleaning in their specific offices.

## II. Create a plan for more intensive cleaning

☑ **Develop clear, visible plans for immediate and long-term cleaning and disinfecting.** Cleaning plans should follow [CDC guidance](#). According to the CDC, buildings that have not been occupied within the [last seven days](#) require only routine cleaning, with some exceptions.

☑ **Use only EPA-registered disinfectants** that meet CDC requirements for use against appropriate viruses or pathogens. Use products from EPA's [List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-COV-2](#), which are approved for use against coronavirus claims.

☑ **Keep the carpeting clean.** Research indicates that clean carpets play a role in filtering dust and other allergens, as well as some airborne pathogens. Carpet fibers trap contaminants, limiting the spread of these pests. One square foot of carpeting can [trap up to a pound](#) of dirt and dust. To make this solution more effective, follow [CDC guidelines](#) and vacuum when a space is empty to reduce risk of expelling particulates. Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter.

☑ **Limit use of communal spacing.** Per the [CDC](#), consider closing shared spaces such as dining facilities, breakrooms, and gyms, or restrict the number of people allowed in the space at a time to ensure appropriate social distancing. Clean and disinfect communal spaces between use.

## III. Update the building to support a safe and hospitable environment

☑ **Bring back the cubicles.** Although they may be sold under a range of names, plexiglass and other partitions will be in demand to protect staff from coworkers' germs. These transmission barriers will also be necessary in conference rooms.

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- ✓ **Add hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipe stations.** Add stations to individual offices or desks, in addition to common areas and lobbies.
- ✓ **Modify collaboration areas to ensure a 6-foot distance between people.** This may include rearranging seating to promote distancing or limiting chairs available to discourage crowding.
- ✓ **Check your HVAC filter.** The [National Air Filtration Association](#) notes that filtration can serve as part of a risk mitigation strategy. To remove small particulates from the air, HVAC systems should be fitted with properly installed high-efficiency filters. Keep in mind, these filters trap more dust and dirt and thus require frequent changes. Consult your manufacturer for more information.

#### IV. Plan next steps for a more thorough clean

- ✓ **Implement touchless solutions where practical.** This may include keyless entry systems, voice-activated elevators, and no-touch flush valves and faucets.
- ✓ **Consider passive disinfection solutions.** Naturally antimicrobial fabric and copper surfaces already popular in healthcare environments may soon see demand in office spaces.
- ✓ **Spread out the workspace.** Consider investing in larger desks — or removing some workstations to better use existing bench-style workspaces — to encourage ample spacing between employees.
- ✓ **Adopt technology to improve cleaning processes.** Autonomous carpet sweepers, ultraviolet disinfection robots and other automation solutions can ease the burden on staff while providing assurance to employees of higher-level cleaning.
- ✓ **Better track cleaning.** Room-booking applications have become increasingly popular and that may only increase as software providers add a last-sanitized element. Consider proximity tracing solutions that help manage space usage and identify a “last cleaned” or “clean needed” for shared spaces.
- ✓ **Rethink your airflow.** Early [research](#) indicates that the risk of infection from COVID-19 is much greater in an enclosed environment compared to an open air environment. When possible, encourage workers to open windows to [improve airflow](#) to dilute virus particles and reduce the spread of infection.
- ✓ **Consider data or certifications that confirm cleanliness.** Any solution that can provide data on the level of cleaning achieved will become invaluable in addressing employees’ concerns. This might range from data-rich robotic cleaning solutions to accreditation programs that demonstrate to employees that cleaning staff is trained to use best practices for reducing infection risks.



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