

Modifying your workplace for return to work

As you decide to return to the office, it won't be business as usual. Instead of going back to normal, it's time to establish your new normal with the understanding that your policies will likely adjust and evolve as time passes.

When modifying your workplace for reopening the office, you want to consider procedures related to every part of the company, including in-person meetings, common areas, and general hygiene practices.

In-person meetings

When possible, in-person meetings should be kept to a minimum. You can continue to have meetings remotely to maintain social distancing.

If in-person meetings are required, you want to configure the space, so those present are at a minimum of 6 feet away to limit contact. Also, have those who are present wear face masks to help reduce the risk of spreading the virus.

Building occupancy

Overall, you want to limit the occupancy in your building. All situations will be different, depending on your staff size and how your building is set up, so it might require some creativity to keep everyone safe.

You can consider various ways to reduce the building occupancy, such as rotating employee schedules, so everyone isn't in the building at the same time. With this plan in place, those who are not in the office can continue teleworking from home.

For those in the building, you want to promote social distancing and limiting in-person contact.

Common areas

You must reconsider the use of common areas in the building. You want to either close them or reconfigure these spaces to promote social distancing.

Areas to consider include break rooms, elevators, meeting rooms, and any shared workspaces.

Social Distancing: You can reconfigure furniture to create distance or incorporate space markers on the floor to help generate distance.

Common Workspaces: If shared workspaces can't be 6 feet away, you want to place vertical separators between spaces that are tall enough to protect those working in the area.

Elevators: You want to reduce the number of people in elevators at any given time. You can do this by encouraging people to take the stairs, placing a limit on the number of people in the elevator, and requiring those in the elevator with others to wear face masks.

Foot Traffic: You can also place arrows on the floor to manage foot traffic in common areas.

Food services

If your company serves food, you want to ensure that only prepackaged food items are sold to reduce the spread of the virus. In breakrooms, you should eliminate open snacks and ban the staff from bringing foods made at home to share with others.

Hygiene practices

Proper hygiene should be promoted more than usual through hand washing, using hand sanitizer, and ensuring that the building and items within the building are sanitized regularly.

Handwashing

You want to have soap and running water available for regular handwashing. Also, have physical reminders posted around the building to encourage handwashing.

While handwashing is best, you should also have hand sanitizer readily available as an alternative if needed.

Building sanitation

The building should also be sanitized regularly by the cleaning staff, paying particular attention to high touch areas such as doorknobs, light switches, and buttons on equipment throughout the office.

You want to have ample cleaning supplies available, so you're ready to keep the building clean. If necessary, you might want to also consider having cleaning supplies available for staff use who want to sanitize their spaces throughout the day.

Sharing materials

Also, establish procedures to help with hygiene, such as reducing shared materials and equipment and disinfecting items every time they are shared to reduce the potential spread of the virus.

Ventilation

Any way you can improve the ventilation in the building is beneficial, so if you can open windows and doors or install additional air purification equipment, you should consider doing so.

Employee training

To promote safer practices, you want to ensure that everyone has received the proper training on these new protocols.

There should be clear expectations outlined related to social distancing, hand washing, face covering, self-screening for symptoms, what to do if they're ill, what to do if they're diagnosed with COVID-19, and more.

Also, have a transparent process in place for those who have questions about the policies and procedures so every one is on the same page.

Additional recommendations for reopening the office

Along with the recommendations listed above, here are some additional suggestions to keep in mind as your

employees return to work.

- Track everyone who enters the building. This will help you to implement contact tracing in case someone is diagnosed with COVID-19.
- If someone from your office is diagnosed with COVID-19, follow the plan for isolation, contact tracing, and communication to help stop the spread.
- Limit any unnecessary visitors to the office
- Limit any unnecessary work-related travel