



HEALTHIER WORKPLACES | A HEALTHIER WORLD

Reopening: Guidance for **General Office Settings**

Guidance Document

[aiha.org](https://www.aiha.org)

Overview

Companies across all industries and sectors have been affected to some extent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many were deemed “non-essential” in the United States (U.S.) by state and federal governments, resulting in employers halting operations and closing workplaces. The reopening of office workplaces should be conducted in a thorough manner accounting for multiple factors before employees are allowed to return. Employers in office settings should not only address preparing the workplace for employees to return and operations to resume during a pandemic (e.g., enhanced disinfection measures), but also the indoor environmental quality (IEQ) of the workspace. For businesses with indoor workplaces, IEQ is a concern, especially for buildings that have been unoccupied and/or dormant for extended periods. Employers should also consider the comfort of employees as they return to work as they may be in a heightened state of concern. Putting in place thoughtful measures to ensure employees are well-positioned to transition back to work with minimal disruption is important.

With restrictions beginning to lift, employers are challenged with difficult questions pertaining to preparing offices to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission during operations and addressing IEQ concerns before reopening, such as:

- Should I inspect the entire workplace before reopening?
 - Should I run my HVAC system for a specific time period prior to reopening?
 - How should I investigate odors?
 - Should I wait after disinfecting before reopening?
 - How can I prepare my employees for the heightened policy and guidelines now in place?
- How can I help alleviate stress and concern for employees while at work?
 - What should I do to ensure that I am reducing the risk of transmission in common areas?
 - How do I address items frequently used by employees (e.g., vending machines, coffee makers, ice machines, etc.)?

SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, is thought to be spread primarily through aerosolized respiratory droplets at close range. Airborne transmission from exposure to very small droplets over long distances is unlikely. However, there is evidence that this mode of transmission is possible, particularly in crowded, indoor spaces. People may also become infected by touching contaminated surfaces. The virus has been shown to survive in aerosols for hours and on surfaces for days. Infection can occur through eyes, nose, and mouth exposures. There is also strong evidence that people can spread the virus while pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic.

Several measures can be taken to address COVID-19 concerns before the workplace is fully reopened. Many common approaches to addressing COVID-19 concerns also have the capacity to address IEQ concerns. However, IEQ concerns might also develop as operations resume. Therefore, preventative measures can be implemented to address issues that may arise from increased cleaning and disinfecting activities to address COVID-19 concerns. Lastly, all of this can be completed in a manner that allows for critical operations to be performed and reduces the risk of transmitting COVID-19 in the workplace.

This document offers practical guidance for **employer** and **employee** led actions and in an office setting. It aims to address the key questions above by providing tips for 1) **workplace preparation**, 2) **workforce management** and 3) **employee readiness**.



HEALTHIER WORKPLACES | A HEALTHIER WORLD

AIHA | 3141 Fairview Park Dr., Suite 777 | Falls Church, VA 22042 | aiha.org

WORKPLACE: What should an Employer do to prepare their facility for reopening?

Employers should continually monitor global (World Health Organization [WHO]), federal (Centers for Disease Control [CDC] and Occupational Safety and Health Administration [OSHA]), state, and local guidelines for changes in recommendations, disinfection strategies, worker protections and other best management practices. For example, general guidelines regarding best practices for specific industries, worker hygiene, cleaning and disinfection, physical distancing, and employee wellness should be reviewed and addressed. Changes to best practices may have an impact on IEQ (e.g., changes in cleaning and disinfecting practices may lead to increased chemical emissions, resulting in a need for ventilation modifications). In addition to best practices, companies should consider a re-occupancy plan that includes a detailed response plan describing the actions to be taken if someone becomes ill with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 while at work.

Employers should consider forming a knowledgeable team to monitor, assess, and implement new strategies as they become available. Aspects to reopening an office that should be emphasized during the pandemic include: workplace configuration, conference rooms, lobby and common areas, kitchens, ventilation, and enhanced cleaning and disinfecting practices. All of these aspects, regardless of workplace sector or size, should be considered to ensure both worker safety and comfort when returning to work during a stressful time.

General Office Space Configuration

- Prior to re-occupancy, perform a detailed review of the configuration of your workspaces:
 - Consider eliminating reception seating areas and requesting that guests phone ahead before entering, or install a plastic partition at the reception area.
- Review floorplans and remove or reconfigure seats, furniture and workstations as needed to preserve recommended physical distancing in accordance with guidelines.
- Reconfigure workstations so that employees do not face each other, or, if facing each other cannot be avoided, establish partitions.
- Temporarily remove amenities that are handled with high contact frequency, such as water coolers, coffee makers, and bulk snacks, and replace them with alternatives. Examples include touchless sensor water dispensers, requesting workers bring in their own water bottles/coffee mugs, and providing individually wrapped snacks.
 - Consider using signage to deter use of such amenities.
- If vending machines are used, provide disinfectants and require wipe down after each use.
- Reduce tasks requiring large amounts of people to be in one area. Design work to reduce or eliminate congregating in the same area.
- Employees should be encouraged to use virtual meeting tools, including phone and virtual teleconference, in lieu of in-person meetings, whenever possible.
 - If in-person meetings are essential, consider limiting meetings to 10 people or less depending on local, state, and federal guidelines and the room size and ability to physical distance from others.

Conference Rooms

- Conference rooms that are used should be disinfected on a daily basis at minimum.
 - Disinfectant wipes or spray should be left in each conference room and employees should be encouraged to wipe down all surfaces and equipment (e.g., mouse, keyboard, phone) touched during conference room meetings.



HEALTHIER WORKPLACES | A HEALTHIER WORLD

AIHA | 3141 Fairview Park Dr., Suite 777 | Falls Church, VA 22042 | aiha.org

- Consider limiting in-person meetings if virtual meetings are not feasible.
- If meetings are to occur in person, they should be conducted as quickly as possible.
 - Lingering and socializing before and after meetings should be discouraged.

Lobby and Common Areas

- Common areas (e.g., lobby, security check-in) should be cleaned and disinfected on a daily basis at minimum.
- Regulate the use of common areas with clear signage (including maximum occupancy) and physical distancing measures in accordance with public health rules and guidelines.
 - Provide cleaning and disinfecting supplies for employees to utilize before/after they use common spaces and contact surfaces.
 - Encourage staff not to linger or socialize in common areas.
 - If physical distancing is not possible, then partitions can be placed between desks.
- Disinfect all surfaces and commonly touched equipment (e.g., check-in tablets).
- Employers and employees should not provide communal meals to employees, and should not make food available in common areas where employees may congregate.
- At minimum, shared kitchen areas should be cleaned and disinfected on a daily basis.
- Kitchen equipment should also be cleaned on a routine basis:
 - Coffee machines, refrigerator handles, and the ice machine handles should be disinfected at least three times per day.
 - The outside of dishwashers should be cleaned at the beginning and end of each shift.
- All silverware and dinnerware should be cleaned in the dishwasher. This helps ensure thorough cleaning and disinfection.
- Silverware should be stored in a way so that adjacent silverware is not easily touched when a worker is retrieving a piece.
- Ice machines that require a handheld scoop should not be used, as it is difficult to control potential contamination in this case.
- Water/beverage faucets that are hand operated should also be disinfected at least three times per day.
- If silverware and dishes cannot be kept clean and covered, disposable options are recommended.
- Congregating in kitchen areas should be discouraged.

Cafeterias

Notably, according to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the CDC, there is currently no evidence to support transmission of SARS-CoV-2 associated with food. Existing food safety requirements are already stringent and reduce the likelihood of foodborne disease transmission. Additional measures can be taken to reduce the risk of transmitting SARS-CoV-2 from touching surfaces or from person-to-person spread through respiratory droplets.

- In buildings that offer cafeteria-style service or food courts, several protective measures should be implemented. Examples include: reduced capacity, staggered lunch schedules, pick-up only, removal of self-serve food items and dinnerware/drinkware, physical distancing, physical barriers, limiting the number of people who can sit together, enhanced disinfection and sanitization, and touchless payment options.
- Consider reducing occupant capacity during peak times, or stagger breakfast/lunch or dinner schedules when practical.



HEALTHIER WORKPLACES | A HEALTHIER WORLD

AIHA | 3141 Fairview Park Dr., Suite 777 | Falls Church, VA 22042 | aiha.org

- Consider establishing pick-up as an alternative to those who want to limit their time in the space, and pick-up only when crowding cannot be managed.
- Remove self-serve food items. Remove hot and cold food bars with open food items and communal serving stations.
- Remove dinnerware/drinkware from communal spaces and only issue as needed.
- Replace communal condiments with single serving, individually wrapped items.
- Implement physical distancing by spacing out any queues, only allowing seating at every other table, or expanding the dining area to include more space.
- Consider implementing physical barriers in between seating.
- Limit the number of people who can sit together.
- Implement enhanced disinfection and sanitization measures both in the kitchen and dining areas.
- Consider adding touchless payment options and pre-ordering of food items.
- Require gloves for all back of house (BOH) staff and ensure the gloves are changed per current industry standards.
- Although not necessary if hand-washing protocols are rigorously followed, consider providing gloves to servers.
 - If they are worn, they must be changed regularly and are not a substitution for handwashing.
- Require cloth or disposable face coverings for BOH staff – type depends on local requirements and availability.
- Provide or encourage all other employees to wear cloth or disposable face coverings and gloves, and to use alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropyl alcohol.

NOTE: If an employer chooses to provide or the employee supplies their own an N95 respirator, please fully consider all the potential OSHA requirements.

Restrooms

- Post signage limiting restroom occupancy to allow for proper physical distancing and to remind employees to wash hands before and after using the restroom.
- Minimize touchpoints entering and existing restrooms, if possible.
- If the door cannot be opened without touching the handle, provide paper towels and a trash can by the door so a paper towel can be used when touching the handle and then discarded.
 - Consider controlling access to bathrooms with a key so disinfection measures can be better managed. If a key is used, consider disinfecting it after each use.
- Doors to multi-stall restrooms should be able to be opened and closed without touching handles if possible.
- Place signs indicating that toilet lids (if present) should be closed before and after flushing.
- Use no-touch faucets, towel dispensers, soap dispensers, and waste receptacles when possible.
- Hand soap should be readily available for use by occupants.
- Provide paper towels and air dryers in restrooms.¹
 - The WHO and CDC currently state that hands can be dried using a paper towel or hand dryer.
 - Due to current uncertainties surrounding the transmission of SARS-CoV-2, care should be taken when using a hand dryer or paper towel.

¹NOTE VERSION CHANGE: In version 3 of this guidance document, in the section titled “Restrooms” it stated to disconnect or tape off the hand dryer.



HEALTHIER WORKPLACES | A HEALTHIER WORLD

AIHA | 3141 Fairview Park Dr., Suite 777 | Falls Church, VA 22042 | aiha.org

- The use of touch or push hand dryers is discouraged due to possible surface contamination. If hand dryers are used, consider touchless devices.
- Businesses and employers should work with HVAC professionals to ensure that bathrooms are well ventilated, and if filtration is used, that proper filtration practices are being followed.
- Increase frequency and efforts to keep bathrooms clean and properly disinfected and maintain a record of sanitary work practices.

Ventilation

- Provide natural ventilation by opening windows and doors whenever possible to increase air flow. If windows and doors cannot remain open, provide good indoor air quality by:
 - Keeping HVAC system operational to maintain thermal comfort and maximize outdoor air based on system design.
 - Maintaining the relative humidity at 40–60%.
 - Limiting the use of portable pedestal or overhead ceiling fans.
 - If fans such as pedestal, desk or hard mounted fans are used, take steps to minimize air from fans blowing from one person directly to another.
 - Ensure that the proper filtration is being used for not only normal office use but also what is recommended to control SARS-CoV-2 transmission.
 - Clean and disinfect all HVAC intakes and returns daily.
 - If fans are disabled or removed, employers should remain aware of, and take steps to prevent, [heat hazards](#).
- If you need assistance on HVAC issues, ask an HVAC professional and see the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers' (ASHRAE) [COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\) Preparedness Resources](#) updates for more information.
- AIHA Occupational and Environmental Health and Safety (OEHS) Science Professionals and industrial hygienists are also well versed in general dilution ventilation. AIHA has a [consultants list](#) of such qualified professionals.

Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfecting Practices

- Select appropriate disinfectants – consider effectiveness and safety.
 - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has developed a [list of products](#) that meet EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2.
 - Do not mix different EPA registered chemicals together. The combination could be toxic by inhalation. Be particularly careful when using any products containing ammonia, sodium hypochlorite (bleach), or hydrogen peroxide.
 - Review product labels and Safety Data Sheets (SDS) and follow manufacturer specifications for cleaning/disinfecting.
 - Consider consulting an Occupational and Environmental Health and Safety (OEHS) Science Professional or Industrial Hygiene expert if additional advice is needed. AIHA has a [consultants list](#) of such qualified professionals.
- Establish a disinfection routine.
 - Ensure disinfection protocols follow product instructions for application and contact time. All items should be allowed to dry thoroughly after cleaning.
 - Use disposable wipes or rags when available. If not available, ensure rags are maintained, handled, and cleaned per product instructions.
- Consider developing a standard operating procedure, a checklist, or audit system to consistently train staff on enhanced cleaning/disinfecting practices or to track when and how cleaning and disinfecting is conducted. Note that this may be a requirement in some states or local jurisdictions.



HEALTHIER WORKPLACES | A HEALTHIER WORLD

AIHA | 3141 Fairview Park Dr., Suite 777 | Falls Church, VA 22042 | aiha.org

- All contact surfaces should be disinfected regularly, including:
 - Individual workspaces between each shift.
 - Common area contact surfaces between each use. Examples of commonly touched surfaces in office settings include door handles, elevator buttons, bathroom surfaces, kitchen appliances and surfaces, sign-in areas, common office electronics (e.g., phones, printers, keyboards and mice, and personal devices).
- Single-use items and used disinfection materials can be treated as regular waste, following regular safety guidelines.
- Any reused cloth materials should be washed and dried on the highest temperature setting allowable for the fabric.
- Deeper cleaning and disinfecting protocols should be developed and implemented in cases where confirmed cases of COVID-19 are discovered. Refer to AIHA's [Workplace Cleaning for COVID-19](#).
- Remove items and personal effects from surfaces to facilitate surface cleaning.
 - Request that occupants remove items from desks and other surfaces before leaving work each day.
 - Identify items with likely surface contact that are difficult to clean and remove or replace with alternatives.
- Odors
- Pests and rodents
- Irritation from cleaners and disinfectants
- Employees feeling ill while at work
- Ensuring proper ventilation during the pandemic
- Varying pressures across workplace
- Humidity and temperature at an uncomfortable setting

Temperature and Humidity

- Ensure that temperature and humidity are set at range that are comfortable for most people. Some ways to do this are:
 - Maintain temperature at 68.5-75°F in the winter, and from 75-80.5°F in the summer.
 - Inspect windows and doors prior to reopening to ensure that leaks are not present.
 - Maintain relative humidity at 40-60%.
 - Ensure there is no standing water in the workplace.

Odors

- If odors are present prior to reopening, then facility management or a consultant should be contacted before investigating.
- If odors are noticed in a workplace where chemicals are stored, then a safety professional should be consulted.
- Common sources of odors can be due to:
 - P-traps in plumbing system
 - Carpet and furnishing off-gassing
 - Garbage/trash
 - Rodents and pests
 - Water intrusion
 - Refrigerator malfunction and drip pans
 - Unattended plants
 - Spoiled foods

Indoor Environmental Quality (IEQ) Considerations

Employers and business owners may encounter IEQ issues because workplaces have not been occupied or maintained during the period of stay-at-home orders. AIHA has [previously developed guidance](#) for COVID-19-related building closures. As a major factor in employee comfort in office settings, IEQ issues are also discussed below.

Common IEQ issues include:

- Water damage



HEALTHIER WORKPLACES | A HEALTHIER WORLD

AIHA | 3141 Fairview Park Dr., Suite 777 | Falls Church, VA 22042 | aiha.org

Water Damage

- During workplace inspections, employers should ensure that water damage or standing water is not present. Signs of water damage include:
 - Stained ceiling tile(s)
 - Bubbling paint
 - Carpet damage
 - Buckled floor
- Water damage can lead to mold growth that can contribute to adverse health effects if employees are exposed.
- If water damage is discovered, facilities management or a consultant should be contacted.
- If standing water is located, then water should be drained in a safe manner as soon as possible.
 - If the source of water is not obvious or located in a hazardous area, then facilities management or a consultant should be contacted.
- Areas where water intrusion may occur:
 - Behind sinks
 - Refrigerators
 - Ice machines
 - Vending machines
 - Centralized plumbing rooms
 - Toilets
 - Water fountains
 - Windows and doors
 - Crawlspace

Waste

- Outdoor and indoor waste areas should be inspected to ensure that waste was removed prior to shelter-in-place and stay at home measures were implemented.

- If waste remained in or around the workplace during shutdown, then rodents, pests, and opportunistic microbes may be present.
 - Facilities management or a consultant should be notified to clean up infested waste while wearing the appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- If odors produced from waste are present, then it is recommended to either adjust ventilation accordingly or open window and doors.
- Employers should be aware the waste pickup schedules may be altered, delayed, or rescheduled during the pandemic response.
- Employers are discouraged from attempting to “cover up” odors using products that produce a fragrance as employees may have an adverse reaction upon exposure.

HVAC Maintenance

- Specific PPE for HVAC professionals and technicians depends on the exact task they are performing. HVAC professionals can be exposed to electrical hazards, chemical hazards, biological hazards, various respiratory risks, confined spaces, use of machine power tools, and general maintenance work. It is important to perform a Job Hazard Analysis prior to beginning the task.
- It is recommended that all maintenance workers working on ventilation systems wear a Tyvek jumpsuit (possibly with hood), eye protection (safety glasses or goggles), gloves, and an N95 respirator.
- Workers should be properly trained on all hazards associated with their tasks. They should be shown how to put on and take off suits and respirators without cross-contaminating themselves. They should be trained on cleaning and disinfecting protocols, as well as general HVAC training prior to starting any tasks.



HEALTHIER WORKPLACES | A HEALTHIER WORLD

AIHA | 3141 Fairview Park Dr., Suite 777 | Falls Church, VA 22042 | aiha.org

- Additional resources for consideration:
 - National Air Duct Cleaners Associations (NADCA) provides HVAC cleaning system service guidance.
 - OSHA provides Legionella control and prevention guidance as well as guidance on mold in the workplace.
 - For Legionella, OSHA provides PPE recommendations for routine maintenance, cleaning, and disinfection of HVAC systems.

WORKFORCE: What should an Employer do to prepare their employees for reopening?

During the reopening process, employers should also consider how they will prepare their workforce to return. Aspects such as communication, training, and employee comfort are important to have in mind during development of the reopening plan.

Communication

- Adopt a communication policy that is customized to your organization that emphasizes transparency.
 - Communicate to employees what is being done to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 (e.g., disinfection routine, health policies for staff, and health and safety measures in place).
 - Establish formal and informal routes of communication for employees to express concerns, questions, comments, and feedback as it relates to IEQ.
- Communicate that employers may limit office hours and close-off or prohibit public access if needed.
- Employers should explore work-from-home options, staggering work shift/hours, and other flexible approaches for employees.
- If the workplace is located in a multi-tenant location, consider establishing a communication path-

way with other tenants to inform of confirmed COVID-19 cases present in the building.

- Tenants should also communicate IEQ concerns and response with one another to ensure all systems are in agreement and balanced (e.g., HVAC systems can be shared by multiple tenants, therefore adjusting the system in one area may have negative effects in another area).
- Ask employees to consider the following if they commute to work using public transportation:
 - Use other forms of transportation if possible.
 - If taking public transportation, maintain physical distancing and wear a cloth or disposable face covering.
 - Change commute time to less busy times if possible.
 - Wash hands before and as soon as possible after their trip.
- Platforms for communicating with employees could include emails, texts, automated phone calls, texts, websites, and signage.

Training

- Employers should notify employees of new workplace policies and changes prior to reopening and upon resuming operations.
- Train employees on new or modified working schedules, how they can stay up to date on new scheduling requirements, and how to make requests for schedule changes if a need arises.
- Implement and inform employees of supportive workplace policies as applicable:
 - Flexible sick leave policies consistent with public health guidance. Providing paid sick leave is an important way to encourage employees to stay home when sick.
 - Consider not requiring a COVID-19 test result or a healthcare provider's note for employees



HEALTHIER WORKPLACES | A HEALTHIER WORLD

AIHA | 3141 Fairview Park Dr., Suite 777 | Falls Church, VA 22042 | aiha.org

who are sick to validate their illness in order to qualify for sick leave. If you do require a doctor's note from your employees to verify that they are healthy and able to return to work, be aware that healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely manner. Get more information related to the [Americans with Disabilities Act during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

- Flexibility to stay home to care for a sick family member.
- Human resources policies consistent with public health guidance, and state and federal workplace laws. For more information on employer responsibilities, visit the [Department of Labor's](#) and the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's](#) websites.
- Employee assistance program and community resources to help employees manage stress and receive support.
- Encourage employees at increased risk for severe illness to request special accommodations to allow them to perform their job duties safely while also protecting sensitive employee health information.
- Post signs and reminders at entrances and in strategic places providing instruction on hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette. This should include signs with images for non-English readers, as needed.
- Encourage those who are sick or at greater risk to stay home. This includes:
 - People with underlying medical conditions.
 - People who live with elderly people or those who are at risk.
 - People with upper respiratory or flu-like symptoms or who live with someone with these clinical symptoms.
- People with COVID-19, people who live with someone with COVID-19, or who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19.
- Employers should educate employees to recognize the [symptoms of COVID-19](#) and provide instructions on what to do if they develop symptoms. At a minimum, any worker should immediately notify their supervisor, their health care provider, and the local health department, who will provide guidance on what actions need to be taken.
- Provide Safety Data Sheets (SDS) for cleaning and disinfection products and ensure employees are aware of the hazards of use. Incorporate new hazards into existing OSHA Hazard Communications Program.
- Employees should receive, at minimum, awareness training on cleaning and disinfection products used in the workplace following OSHA Hazard Communication Standards. For employees who will use disinfectants and cleaners, training should also include proper use, PPE, disposal and all precautionary measures
- Health checks and reporting requirements of individuals infected with COVID-19 should be explained to employees prior to reopening and again once operations have resumed.
- Communicate to staff the importance of being vigilant when monitoring symptoms and staying in touch with their employer or manager if or when they start to feel sick.
- Revisit your leave or sick program to allow for time off and follow all HR Policies and HIPAA/other regulatory requirements.
- Conduct employee temperature screening and wellness checks before each shift. **(NOTE: be sure to comply with OSHA's Access to Employee Exposure Medical Records standard for confidentiality.)**
 - Temperature screening methods can include manual (use non-contact infrared thermometers)



HEALTHIER WORKPLACES | A HEALTHIER WORLD

AIHA | 3141 Fairview Park Dr., Suite 777 | Falls Church, VA 22042 | aiha.org

or thermal camera meeting [FDA recommendations](#). Additional screening information/guidance can be found on the [CDC website](#).

- Assign an employee to manage and conduct the temperature screenings while following CDC guidelines in the above link. If this is not possible, employees can self-check their own temperature.
- Screening should be done in a manner such that the privacy of employees is respected.
- Perform a visual inspection for other signs of illness (e.g., flushed cheeks, rapid or difficulty breathing without recent physical activity, fatigue, extreme fussiness, cough).
- Employees who have a fever of 100.4° F (38° C) or above, or other signs of illness should not be admitted to the facility.
- Employers can consider incorporating a wellness questionnaire with questions such as:
 - Have you, or a person you have been in close contact with, been diagnosed with COVID-19 within the last 14 days? (close contact is 6 feet or less for more than 10 minutes.)
 - Have you experienced any cold or flu-like symptoms in the last 72 hours (to include fever, shortness of breath, cough, sore throat, difficulty breathing, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea)?
 - Have you traveled to an international or domestic “hot spot” in the last 14 days?
 - There are a number of examples available for wellness questionnaires (see Resources below).
- Require employees who have symptoms or signs (i.e., fever, cough, or shortness of breath) or who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 to notify their supervisor and stay home.
- Sick employees should follow the CDC-recommended steps. Employees should not return to work until the criteria to discontinue home isolation are met in consultation with healthcare providers and state and local health departments. Consider waiving requirements for medical documentation during the pandemic, as CDC has advised people with mild illness NOT to go to the doctor’s office or emergency room.
- If employee is sick or receives positive COVID-19 test results, results should be reported to employer. In the case of a positive COVID-19 test result, the employee must stay home until cleared for physical return to the workplace by their medical provider, following the CDC’s [Discontinuation of Isolation for Persons with COVID -19 Not in Healthcare Settings](#).
- If an employee tests positive:
 - Follow federal, state, and local recommendations for reporting and communicating cases, while remaining compliant with regulations and guidelines pertaining to protecting private health information such as confidentiality required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). See OSHA for guidance on reporting workplace exposures to COVID-19.
 - Engage HR immediately and enforce all applicable HR rules and regulations.
 - The employee shall be isolated to the area they are in currently and removed from the work site for a minimum of 14 days.
 - Any individuals having “close contact” (within approximately 6 feet) with the sick employee should also be isolated from the work site for 14 days; and all other employees should continue to follow physical distancing rules. Communicate and reinforce with employees, while maintaining PII and HIPAA requirements, that they may have been exposed and to closely monitor their health, temperature, and current symptoms as identified by the CDC. Contact tracing and sharing of employee information should be done under the guidance of Human Resources due to privacy re-



HEALTHIER WORKPLACES | A HEALTHIER WORLD

AIHA | 3141 Fairview Park Dr., Suite 777 | Falls Church, VA 22042 | aiha.org

quirements of HIPAA, ADA, and EEOC. See the CDC's "[Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) General Business Frequently Asked Questions](#)".

- Enhanced cleaning and disinfecting should be done immediately by trained personnel, who should wear face coverings and gloves, dispose of gloves after use, and wash hands and face when complete. Visibly dirty surfaces shall be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water PRIOR to disinfection.
- For disinfection, use only EPA-registered disinfectants on [List-N](#).
- At minimum, employees should wash their hands after they have been in a public place, after touching their face covering, after blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing, after using the restroom, after touching any common contact surfaces, and before eating. **Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.**
- Employees should wash hands with clean, running water, apply soap, lather and scrub for at least 20 seconds, then rinse. Dry hands using a clean paper towel or air dry. When soap and water can't be used, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropyl alcohol. Any use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers should follow local and State guidelines.
- Make hand sanitizer stations available throughout work and public places. Stations should also be placed in convenient locations, such as at entrances, exits, near elevators, and restrooms. Touch-free hand sanitizer dispensers should be installed where possible.

Employee Comfort

- Prior to reopening, consider flexible work schedules, work from home options, and anticipate a hesitant and potentially uncomfortable workforce.
- Ensure that the workspace is welcoming and well-prepared for employee occupancy.

- All aspects described above should be addressed prior to reopening and on a routine basis after the returning to work.
- Ensuring employee comfort helps instill confidence in management and employer during a stressful time.
- Management and leadership are encouraged to continuously check-in with employees to ensure that all concerns are heard, understood, and addressed (see Communication section above).
- Ensure all protective measures and supplies are available prior to occupancy (e.g., demarcate floors that have access to the public, rearrange office layout to increase distance between employees, provide adequate hand washing/hand sanitizer supplies, etc.).
 - Employee awareness of preparation measures and supplies contributes directly to the comfort employees can experience in the workplace.

EMPLOYEES: What should an Employee do to prepare to go back to the office?

- Ask employers of new workplace policies, training, and other changes related to all of the above topics.
- Employees should evaluate their health continuously; if they are sick, have a fever or symptoms, or someone at home is sick, then they should remain home. **NOTE: Employer HR Policies, HIPAA guidelines and other laws should be followed at all times.**
- Maintain cloth or disposable (or better if you have it) face covering, clean or replace frequently, and use at minimum when unable to maintain physical distancing of 6-feet.
- Maintain good hygiene practices (washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or a hand sanitizer with at least 60% ethanol or 70%



HEALTHIER WORKPLACES | A HEALTHIER WORLD

AIHA | 3141 Fairview Park Dr., Suite 777 | Falls Church, VA 22042 | aiha.org

isopropyl alcohol). For more information, refer to [CDC's handwashing guidelines](#).

- If an employee tests positive for COVID-19:
 - Stay home and isolate until cleared for physical return to the workplace by your medical provider, following the CDC's [Discontinuation of Isolation for Persons with COVID -19 Not in Healthcare Settings](#).
 - Contact your supervisor and report your results as soon as possible.
 - Notify your supervisor about others in the workplace with whom you came into contact.
- At minimum, employees should wash their hands after they have been in a public place, after touching their face covering, after blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing, after using the restroom, after touching any common contact surfaces, and before eating. **Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.**
- Employees should wash hands with clean, running water, apply soap, lather and scrub for at least 20 seconds, then rinse. Dry hands using a clean paper towel or air dry. When soap and water can't be used, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropyl alcohol. Any use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers should follow local and State guidelines.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and throw used tissues in the trash. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow, not your hands. Immediately wash your hands after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing. Learn more about [coughing and sneezing](#) etiquette.
- Depending on local requirements, in alignment with CDC recommendations, wear a cloth or disposable face covering whenever physical distancing cannot be maintained (indoors or outdoors). Ensure the face covering is properly maintained and cleaned. Additional information on cloth face coverings can be found on [CDC's website](#). **(NOTE: Cloth or disposable face coverings primarily protect other people. A cloth or disposable face covering is not a substitute for physical distancing.)**
- With the exception of children less than two, and individuals who have difficulty breathing, are unconscious, or otherwise unable to remove a face covering without assistance, CDC recommends that all people wear a cloth or disposable face covering in public settings and when around people who don't live in their household, especially when other physical distancing measures are difficult to maintain.
- Non-medical cloth or disposable face coverings are NOT Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), but they do offer some protection to others and should be worn while near other people in common spaces or shared workspaces. They are not a substitute for physical distancing, engineering controls, cleaning and disinfecting, proper hygiene, or staying home while sick.
- Remove cloth or disposable face coverings correctly and wash hands after handling or touching a used face covering.
- Wash cloth face coverings after each use. Cloth face coverings can be included with regular laundry. Use regular laundry detergent and the warmest appropriate water setting for the cloth used to make the face covering. Use the highest heat setting and leave in the dryer until completely dry. If air drying, lay flat and allow to completely dry. If possible, place in direct sunlight.
- Let your employer know if you have concerns about PPE that may be provided to you and that you are properly instructed on how to use it. [The CDC has recommended sequences for donning and doffing PPE.](#)



HEALTHIER WORKPLACES | A HEALTHIER WORLD

AIHA | 3141 Fairview Park Dr., Suite 777 | Falls Church, VA 22042 | aiha.org

- If you are using the office cafeteria, please consider:
 - Using take-out/pick-up services where you can.
 - Wearing a cloth or disposable face covering as you enter and leave the building.
 - Washing your hands before and after you leave the cafeteria if possible. If not, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropyl alcohol when you sit down and before you leave the building.
 - Maintaining a distance of at least 6 feet from other customers and employees when waiting for a table and when walking throughout the cafeteria to the extent possible.
 - Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and throw used tissues in the trash. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow, not your hands. Immediately wash your hands after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing. Learn more about [coughing and sneezing](#) etiquette.
- OSHA provides resources discussing [IAQ and related topics](#) for workplaces.
- NIOSH provides a centralized resource for discussions around [IEQ in the workplace](#).
- CDC Health Screening [“Should we be screening employees for COVID-19 symptoms?”](#) section of [General Business Frequently Asked Questions](#).
- [WHO Key Messages and Actions for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools website](#).
- AIHA's Indoor Environmental Quality Committee developed these guidance documents about reopening and cleaning buildings after closures due to COVID-19: [Recovering from COVID-19 Building Closures](#) and [Workplace Cleaning for COVID-19](#).
- AIHA's [Considerations on the Safe Use of UVC Radiation](#)
- AIHA's [Focus on Construction Health: COVID-19](#)
- AIHA's [Effective and Safe Practices: Guidance for Custodians, Cleaning and Maintenance Staff](#)
- AIHA's [Employers Guide to COVID-19 Cleaning & Disinfection in Non-Healthcare Workplaces](#)
- AIHA's [Reducing Risk of COVID-19 Using Engineering Controls](#)
- AIHA's [PPE for SARS-CoV-2](#)
- AIHA's [Use of Real Time Detection Systems](#)
- AIHA's [Proper Use of Respirators for Healthcare Workers & First Responders](#)
- AIHA's [Workers Rights White Paper](#)

Worker Rights

AIHA believes that basic protections are worker rights, as well as an essential ingredient of occupational health and safety systems, and that employers must provide a safe and healthful work environment.

Resources

- [Building Owners & Managers Association International \(BOMA\)](#).
- EPA has developed a [list of disinfectants](#) for use against SARS-CoV-2.
- ASHRAE has a list of [COVID-19 resources](#) for addressing HVAC challenges in workplaces during the pandemic.



HEALTHIER WORKPLACES | A HEALTHIER WORLD

AIHA | 3141 Fairview Park Dr., Suite 777 | Falls Church, VA 22042 | [aiha.org](#)

AIHA®

AIHA is the association for scientists and professionals committed to preserving and ensuring occupational and environmental health and safety (OEHS) in the workplace and community. Founded in 1939 as the American Industrial Hygiene Association® (AIHA®), we support our members with our expertise, networks, comprehensive education programs and other products and services that help them maintain the highest professional and competency standards. More than half of AIHA's nearly 8,500 members are Certified Industrial Hygienists (CIH), and many hold other professional designations. AIHA serves as a resource for those employed across the public and private sectors, as well as to the communities in which they work. For more information, visit [AIHA.org](https://www.aiha.org).

About Occupational and Environmental Health and Safety Professionals

Occupational and environmental health and safety (OEHS) professionals (also known as industrial hygienists) practice the science of anticipating, recognizing, evaluating, controlling and confirming workplace conditions that may cause workers' injury or illness. Through a continuous improvement cycle of planning, doing, checking and acting, OEHS professionals make sure workplaces are healthy and safe.

- Get additional resources at AIHA's [Coronavirus Outbreak Resource Center](#).
- Find a qualified industrial hygiene and OEHS professionals near you in our [Consultants Listing](#).

Disclaimer

AIHA is not legally responsible and shall be held harmless from all claims, causes of action, and demands, whatsoever, any third party may incur on account of damage, loss or injury resulting from adhering to these guidelines.

These guidance documents were primarily developed for those smaller business that don't have readily available occupational health and safety resources, and designed to help business owners, employers, employees and consumers implement science-backed procedures for limiting the spread of the coronavirus. They are subject to any local, state, or federal directives, laws, or orders about operating a business and should only be used if they do not conflict with any such orders.

These documents are subject to revision and shall be updated accordingly.

AIHA makes no representations or warranties of any kind concerning its Copyrighted Material, either express or implied, including without limitation any implied warranties of merchantability, title, infringement or fitness for a particular purpose. AIHA shall be indemnified, defended and held harmless by all third parties and their directors, officers, agents, employees and assigns, and anyone authorized by any of them, from and against any and all claims, liabilities, losses and damages, including reasonable attorneys' fees, caused by or arising wholly or in part from the use of the Copyrighted Material.



| backtoworksafely.org

Periodically scan this QR Code to check if any new versions of AIHA's guidance documents have been posted, as well as to find guidance documents for other businesses and industries.



HEALTHIER WORKPLACES | A HEALTHIER WORLD

AIHA | 3141 Fairview Park Dr., Suite 777 | Falls Church, VA 22042 | [aiha.org](https://www.aiha.org)