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COVID-19 Returning to the Office Checklist

A guide for facility and workplace teams

As the world gradually recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, governments have begun to focus on safely transitioning employees back into the office. To help them in that endeavor, OfficeSpace has written a comprehensive 'return to work' checklist.

This list is based off the conversations we've had with over 100 of our clients, along with the most up-to-date resources currently available.

Facility Entry

- [ ] Ensure building entry and exit routes are clearly marked and spaced correctly

- [ ] Stagger employee arrival times to reduce traffic build-up into and out of the facility

- [ ] Identify and clearly mark entrance chokepoints – turnstiles, gates, elevators etc. – that may cause queues to form. Develop a plan to clearly communicate how employees can maintain adequate spacing at all existing checkpoints

- [ ] Provide employees with appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) at point of entry. Provide clear instructions for wear and subsequent safe disposal of the PPE

- [ ] Limit elevator capacity to ensure proper distancing. Encourage employees to use the stairs (with appropriate intervals between them) where possible

- [ ] Limit the number of personal belongings allowed into the office. If possible, provide lockers for employees to securely store items away from primary workspaces

- [ ] Consult with leadership and HR teams to decide whether health screenings (including temperature checks, self-assessment, and/or COVID-19 tests) will be necessary requirements for entry into the facility

- [ ] If health screenings are required, determine the location and process to administer them (especially if the lobby/entrance area is shared between multiple organizations)

- [ ] Develop a separate process for screening visitors and deliveries, along with specific routes for non-workers to reduce contact between them and employees

Strategy for Operating at Reduced Capacity

☐ Determine maximum capacity for each floor of your building to ensure there is adequate space between employee workstations (with reference to new social distancing guidelines)

☐ Work with leaders and HR to develop a strategy for adhering to these new capacity limits. This may include moving towards shift work or establishing priority teams/functions/departments

☐ Create a seating strategy to maintain social distancing measures. Things to cover include removing free address (open) seating arrangements, discouraging the sharing of office equipment, and deciding whether seating will be pre-arranged or bookable

☐ Clearly label paths/routes through the office, including any one-way corridors

☐ Close or limit capacity in common areas (if appropriate/feasible) to maintain recommended social distancing

☐ Label all huddle and conference rooms with permitted capacity and adjust the layout and available seating accordingly

Physical Workplace Configuration

- [ ] Ensure employee workstations are at least six feet (two meters) apart

- [ ] Mark 'active' or 'in-use' workstations, rooms, and common areas to maintain compliance with your company's social distancing guidelines

- [ ] Remove chairs and equipment from inactive workstations

- [ ] Mark closed or inactive rooms so employees know which areas of the facility are operational. It may be necessary to close entire floors or certain common areas, such as kitchens and break rooms

- [ ] Enforce a clean-desk policy to aid nightly workstation sanitation procedures

- [ ] Review existing desk configuration to determine whether you need additional panels or shields between workstations

- [ ] Discourage employees from sharing food and drink – this extends to the use of shared appliances, such as coffee makers

- [ ] Restrict capacity in restrooms to limit the spread of infection

- [ ] Install touchless accessories (door handles, soap dispensers, paper towel dispensers etc.) in restrooms if feasible/applicable

- [ ] Suspend (temporarily) the use of air dryers in restrooms to prevent the spread of potentially contaminated air

Workplace Sanitation

- ☐ Install additional disinfectant wipes and hand sanitizer stations throughout the office. Position them near any surfaces that employees regularly touch (water coolers, manual doors, etc) and ensure the location is clearly labeled

- ☐ Regularly clean high-traffic areas and surfaces, including door handles and shared office equipment (such as printers) with EPA-registered disinfectant

- ☐ Verify that your janitorial service provider has the capability and resources to adhere to government guidelines and industry best practices for cleaning

- ☐ Ensure all workstations receive nightly deep-cleans. Use electro-static cleaning options, where practical

- ☐ Establish a system to track regular cleaning tasks and compliance with the latest standards

- ☐ Increase the circulation of outdoor air coming into the building. Aim for 100% circulation if possible, given ambient conditions

- ☐ Improve air filtration by increasing Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) to the maximum level supported by your Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) system

- ☐ Augment your HVAC filters with portable High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) cleaners (if possible)

- ☐ Centralize trash and recycling collection on each floor, along with the frequency of waste disposal

Responding to a Potential Case of COVID-19

☐ Create an official response plan to deal with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases in the office. Factors to consider include:

- which areas of the facility and departments should be shut down
- the extent of subsequent sanitation measures
- the process that must be followed for deciding when the office (or portions of it) can be reopened

☐ Collaborate with leadership and HR to develop at least one channel for reporting suspected COVID-19 cases or health concerns; ensure information reported is handled in accordance with federal, state, and local privacy regulations

☐ Work with leadership & HR to ensure there is a COVID-19 Response Team designated, which prepares for and responds to a positive (or suspected positive) COVID-19 case in the workplace

☐ Train employees on the response team to follow federal, state & local health regulations, along with company policy, for contact tracing and facility remediation

☐ Ensure a formal notification plan is in place to inform employees of confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases. Care should be taken that the notification and response follow federal, state & local health and privacy guidelines
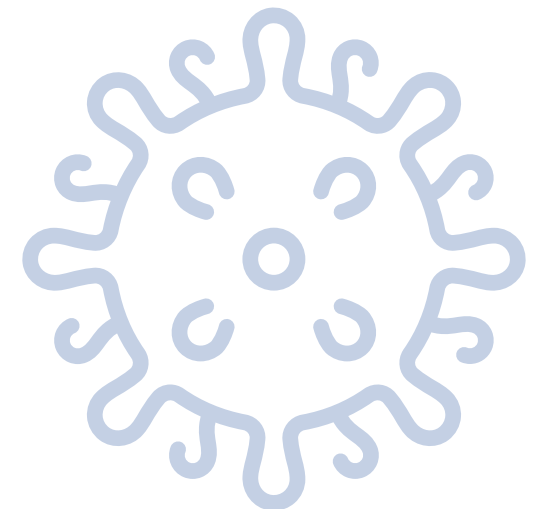
Employee Communication

☐ Communicate early and often to employees about the office changes and timeline for the return to the office

☐ Update online floor plans and digital signage in advance of Day 1 back in the office, so employees can familiarize themselves with the new office layout

☐ Provide regular training, leveraging video & interactive channels, where possible, to remind employees on COVID-19 risk factors and preventative measures

☐ Install signage throughout the office that records when spaces were last cleaned and when future cleans have been scheduled

☐ Share an updated emergency response plan (adapted to the revised office setup/rules) with all employees

☐ Develop a system for employees to leave feedback, alongside a forum where you can review and address their concerns

Please note that this is intended as guidance only and is not prescriptive. Regulations will differ by location and use case, so we advise consulting your local and national government health authorities and workplace regulations to determine the right set of protective measures for your organization.

See below for additional resources and materials.

Resources

OfficeSpace Software – COVID-19 Advice and Strategies

WHO – World Health Organization

CDC (US Center for Disease Control) – Prevention

CDC (US Centre for Disease Control) – Business Response

OSHA – US Occupational Safety & Health Administration

NHS – UK National Health Service

EU – European Commission

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