



RETURN TO WORKPLACE FRAMEWORK *for* COMMERCIAL SPACES



City of Boston
Mayor Martin J. Walsh

OFFICE/COMMERCIAL SPACE OVERVIEW:

The framework below represents the City of Boston's operational recommendations for businesses, employers, and commercial landlords for return-to-work strategies for office workplaces. These operational recommendations incorporate the Commonwealth's Sector Specific Workplace Safety Standards for Office Spaces and supplement them with recommendations based on guidance from the CDC, US Chamber of Commerce, and industry associations to offer best practices for preparing and returning to the physical workplace, preparing your workforce, and ensuring continuity of operations.

These operational recommendations apply to operations [as updated by the Commonwealth on July 24th, 2020](#) and are subject to revision and modification during subsequent phases or as necessitated by public health considerations. These recommendations consider Boston's specific and unique office space needs, such as population density and commuting behavior which may result in a higher vulnerability to rapid spread of COVID-19.

The City of Boston Public Health Recovery Plan assumes the following:

- Reopening services will increase the risk of COVID-19 spread, thus the goal is to know, communicate and manage transmission risk.
- Programs/Services/Industries must be altered, some significantly, for several months or longer until a vaccine or effective treatment is developed.
- All plans must include mechanisms for how programs and services can be quickly scaled back if COVID-19 cases and deaths begin to spike.
- Linguistically and culturally appropriate public messaging and communications are critical.
- The experiences and needs of those disproportionately impacted will be overlooked if not explicitly considered in all plans.

These operational recommendations should be used as a reference in line with Federal and State mandates. At a minimum, employers and building/property management must follow State-issued standards for re-opening office workplaces, including the Commonwealth of Massachusetts mandate that businesses and other organizations shall limit occupancy within their office space to no more than 50 percent of the maximum occupancy level. All actions undertaken to comply with the Commonwealth standards and the City of Boston recommendations must also comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act regulations and Massachusetts Architectural Access Board regulations.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts: Standards for Responsible Office Spaces in Massachusetts

No activity in office spaces can occur without meeting the sector-specific COVID-19 workplace safety standards issued by the Commonwealth and maintaining a certification of compliance with those standards that is available upon request. These standards apply to all businesses and other organizations operating in general use office space until rescinded or amended by the Commonwealth. These minimum standards can be referenced using the following state issued resources, the substance of which is also included below:

- [Massachusetts State Sector Specific Workplace Safety Standards for Office Spaces](#)
- [Office Space Safety Standards and Checklist](#)
- [Office Spaces Protocol Summary](#)

The following workplace specific safety standards are organized around four distinct categories covering Social Distancing, Hygiene Protocols, Staffing and Operations, and Cleaning and Disinfecting.

I. SOCIAL DISTANCING

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Minimum Standards:

- Each office must monitor customer and worker entries and exits and limit occupancy at all times to the greater of the following:
 - 50% of the building's maximum permitted occupancy as documented in its occupancy permit on record with the municipal building department or other municipal record holder
 - Buildings for which no permitted occupancy limitation is on record may allow 10 persons (including staff) per 1,000 square feet of accessible space
 - In any case, no enclosed space within the facility may exceed occupancy of 10 persons per 1,000 square feet
 - All occupancy counts and calculations shall include customers, staff, and other workers
- Businesses and other organizations may exceed this maximum occupancy level based on a demonstrated need for relief based on public health or public safety considerations or where strict compliance may interfere with the continued delivery of critical services
- Ensure separation of 6 feet or more between individuals unless this creates a safety hazard due to the nature of the work or the configuration of the workspace:
 - Close or reconfigure worker common spaces and high density areas where workers are likely to congregate (e.g., break rooms, eating areas) to allow 6 feet of physical distancing; redesign work stations to ensure physical distancing (e.g., separate tables, use distance markers to assure spacing)
 - Cafeterias must practice physical distancing and appropriate hygiene measures and may allow indoor and /or outdoor seating according to Restaurant guidance
 - Physical partitions separating workstations must be installed for areas that cannot be spaced out. Physical partitions must be at least 6 feet in height
 - Establish directional hallways and passageways for foot traffic if possible, to minimize contact. Post clearly visible signage regarding these policies
 - Limit visitors where feasible, and avoid congregation in common areas (e.g., lobbies)
 - Mark rooms and hallways to indicate 6 feet separation
- Stagger work schedules and improve ventilation for enclosed spaces where possible (e.g., open doors and windows)
- Limit meeting sizes, ensure 6 feet of social distancing, and encourage remote participation
- Stagger lunch and break times, regulating maximum number of people in one place and ensuring at least 6 feet of physical distancing
- Minimize the use of confined spaces (e.g., elevators, control rooms, vehicles) by more than one individual at a time; all workers in such spaces at the same time are required to wear face coverings

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Recommended Best Practices:

- Designate assigned working areas (e.g., floor, building) to individuals where possible to limit movement throughout the facility and limit contact between workers

City of Boston Operational Recommendations:

The City of Boston encourages businesses, employers, and commercial landlords to consider the following points when implementing social distancing protocols for location specific areas inside buildings:

Entrances, Lobbies, Reception

- Display clear signage of 6 feet social distancing best practices at all high traffic areas.
- Clearly display 6 feet social distance markers on floors for high traffic areas, particularly where queues and lines form at security checkpoints and elevators.
- Limit entry and access points unless required for compliance with building safety regulations.
- Limit public interactions and public access to buildings by closing lobby seating areas or other public gathering spaces in the building.
- Deploy sanitizing stations at high-traffic areas at entry and exit points, internal and external to the building.
- Where possible, establish standalone single-use sanitizing wipe dispensers.
- Discourage or limit use of revolving doors in favor of swing doors; when possible, leave doors ajar with door stoppers to encourage no-touch entry/exit and ventilation.
- Enable no-touch employee security access points; encourage employees to visibly display identification cards to limit physical contact with surfaces.
- Encourage use of door-stoppers wherever possible to minimize contact with or individual use of doorknobs.

Elevators, Stairwells, Hallways, Corridors

- Limit the number of people in an elevator at a time to no more than four. All individuals must wear face coverings in elevators, except where unsafe due to medical condition or disability.
- For smaller elevators, consider further limitations to ensure that there is still room for physical distancing.
- To alleviate heavy elevator use, building occupants who are able to should be instructed to use the stairs to travel down where feasible. Stair usage should be limited to one direction (down) except in cases of emergency.
- Display clear signage explaining elevator and stair usage policies at all elevator banks and entry/exit points to stairwells.
- Regularly sanitize handrails, buttons, and door handles.

Cafeterias

- Clearly demarcate one-way directional traffic flows and 6 feet social distancing standards for queuing at checkout and cash registers.
- Install touchless payment options where possible and sanitize point of sale terminals after customer use.
- Supply individually wrapped single-use disposable utensils and products.
- Eliminate self-serve fountain machines and coffee stations in favor of closed-bottled drinks and beverages.
- Restrict self-serve condiment stations in favor of individually pre-packaged items or portion controlled single use containers distributed by cafeteria personnel.
- Regularly sanitize napkin dispensers at points of contact.
- Install safety barriers to protect food-service workers at points of contact such as cashier stands and checkout lines.

II. HYGIENE PROTOCOLS

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Minimum Standards:

- Ensure access to handwashing facilities on site, including soap and running water, wherever possible and encourage frequent handwashing; alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol may be used as an alternative
- Supply workers at workplace location with adequate cleaning products (e.g., sanitizer, disinfecting wipes)
- Post visible signage throughout the site to remind workers of the hygiene and safety protocols
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol should be made available at entrances and throughout floor areas for workers
- Require regular and not less than daily cleaning and sanitation of all high-touch areas such as workstations, door handles, and restrooms
- Avoid sharing office materials / equipment or disinfect equipment between use (e.g., telephones, fax machines)

City of Boston Operational Recommendations:

The City of Boston encourages businesses, employers, and commercial landlords to consider the following points when implementing hygiene protocols throughout their buildings:

- Maintain an adequate supply chain to ensure continuity of vital COVID-19 related supplies and identify backup suppliers in the event of restricted supply.
- Where possible, open windows for better ventilation.
- Avoid sharing office equipment or disinfect between use, including but not limited to telephones, computers, copy machines, water coolers, etc.
- *Follow CDC specific recommendations regarding Building Engineering Controls¹*
 - Property and building managers should work to enhance building ventilation standards.
 - Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and provide acceptable indoor air quality for the current occupancy level for each space.
 - Increase outdoor air ventilation, using caution in highly polluted areas. With a lower occupancy level in the building, this increases the effective dilution ventilation per person.
 - Disable demand-controlled ventilation (DCV).
 - Further open minimum outdoor air dampers (as high as 100%) to reduce or eliminate recirculation. In mild weather, this will not affect thermal comfort or humidity. However, this may be difficult to do in cold or hot weather.
 - Improve central air filtration to the MERV-13 or the highest compatible with the filter rack, and seal edges of the filter to limit bypass.
 - Check filters to ensure they are within service life and appropriately installed
 - Keep systems running longer hours, 24/7 if possible, to enhance air exchanges in the building space.

¹Per CDC guidance, “Maintain a Healthy Work Environment”
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>

III. STAFFING AND OPERATIONS

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Minimum Standards:

- Provide training to workers on up-to-date safety information and precautions including hygiene and other measures aimed at reducing disease transmission, including:
 - Social distancing, hand-washing, proper use of face coverings
 - Self-screening at home, including temperature and symptom checks
 - Importance of not coming to work if ill
 - When to seek medical attention if symptoms become severe
 - Which underlying health conditions may make individuals more susceptible to contracting and suffering from a severe case of the virus
- Facilities must screen workers at each shift by ensuring the following:
 - Worker is not experiencing any symptoms such as fever (100.0 and above) or chills, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, fatigue, headache, muscle/body aches, runny nose/congestion, new loss of taste or smell, or nausea, vomiting or diarrhea
 - Worker has not had “close contact” with an individual diagnosed with COVID-19. “Close contact” means living in the same household as a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, caring for a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, being within 6 feet of a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 for 15 minutes or more, or coming in direct contact with secretions (e.g., sharing utensils, being coughed on) from a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, while that person was symptomatic
 - Worker has not been asked to self-isolate or quarantine by their doctor or a local public health official
 - Workers who fail to meet the above criteria must be sent home
- Adjust workplace hours and shifts (leverage working teams with different schedules or staggered arrival / departure) to minimize contact across workers and reduce congestion at entry points
- Maintain a log of workers and customers to support contact tracing (name, date, time, contact information) if needed
- Workers must wear face coverings when social distancing of 6 feet is not possible, except where unsafe due to medical condition or disability
- Employers should establish adjusted workplace hours and shifts for workers (if working in-person, leverage working teams with different schedules or staggered arrival / departure) to minimize contact across workers and reduce congestion at entry points
- Limit visitors and service providers on site; shipping and deliveries should be completed in designated areas
- For guidance on business-sponsored travel, refer to the Commonwealth's **current out-of-state travel order**. Employers are strongly discouraged from allowing business-related travel to destinations other than those appearing on the Department of Public Health's list of COVID-19 lower risk States. Employers that permit employer-paid or -reimbursed travel to those States should take measures to ensure employees comply with this order. Employers are also urged to strongly discourage their employees from taking leisure travel to destinations not included on the list of COVID-19 lower-risk States.
- Workers must stay home if feeling ill
- If the employer is notified of a positive case at the workplace, the employer shall notify the local Board of Health (LBOH) in the city or town where the workplace is located and assist the LBOH as reasonably requested to advise likely contacts to isolate and self-quarantine.

- Testing of other workers may be recommended consistent with guidance and / or at the request of the LBOH
- Post notice to workers and customers of important health information and relevant safety measures as outlined in the Commonwealth’s **Mandatory Safety Standards for Workplace**
- Offices should maintain operating hours that allow for on-going off-hour sanitation and cleaning
- Allow water fountains to be used as refill stations only, provided that social distancing can be maintained. Workers should bring their own water bottles
- Additional on-site amenities and services may only open and operate when those amenities or services would otherwise be authorized to operate under the Commonwealth’s Phased Reopening Plan and then must adhere to all sector-specific safety protocols, available on the **Reopening Plan website**, applicable to the amenity or service. Examples include:
 - Cafeterias: Must follow the latest restaurant guidance

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Recommended Best Practices:

- Employers are encouraged to have workers continue to telework if feasible; external meetings should be remote to reduce density in the office
- Workers who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 according to the Centers for Disease Control (e.g., due to age or underlying conditions) are encouraged to stay home or arrange an alternate work assignment
- Workers are strongly encouraged to self-identify symptoms or any close contact to a known or suspected COVID-19 case to the employer
- Encourage workers who test positive for COVID-19 to disclose to the workplace employer for purposes of cleaning / disinfecting and contact tracing

City of Boston Operational Recommendations:

The City of Boston encourages businesses, employers, and commercial landlords to consider the following points when developing and implementing staffing and operations protocols:

Policies and Documentation

- Identify and clearly communicate a **workplace coordinator** who will be responsible for COVID-19 issues and their impact to the workplace.
- Conduct a thorough hazard assessment² to determine if workplace hazards are present, or likely to be present, and determine what types of mitigants or PPE are necessary for specific job duties.
 - Provide personal protective gear for any employee whose job function requires it, as identified in the hazard assessment, including training on how to don and doff equipment safely
- Building management must ensure that custodial, security and other building management staff have access to the recommended PPE to perform their job function, and that these staff are not responsible for providing their own PPE.
- Develop a policy for screening employees and visitors for symptoms that includes either a temperature or symptom screening at building entrances or an at-home self-assessment. If an at-home self assessment policy is implemented, employees should be encouraged to keep

² Per CDC guidance, “Identify where and how workers might be exposed to COVID-19 at work” <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/office-buildings.html>

personal logs of their symptoms to ensure that they remember to complete the self-assessment each day. Reference the [CDC's recommendations](#) on reducing the spread of COVID-19 in workplaces for more information about recommended screening protocols.

- Establish accommodation and leave policies for employees consistent with Federal and State laws.
 - Consider implementing non-punitive “emergency sick leave” policies. Communicate emergency sick leave benefits as outlined by the [Department of Labor Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#). Provisions exist for private employers with fewer than 500 employees.
 - Employers should consider accepting self-certifications in lieu of doctor's notes for employees who are sick, in order to validate their illness, qualify for sick leave, or to return to work.
 - Connect employees to employee assistance program (EAP) resources, if available, and community resources as needed.

Ongoing Operations

- Ensure employees and visitors to the building use face coverings while in the building, except where unsafe due to medical condition or disability.
 - Note that cloth face coverings and disposable medical masks are sufficient for office environments, and that N95 respirators are not appropriate and require medical clearance and fit testing to use properly and safely.
- Employers should make face coverings available for their employees (reusable, cloth face coverings when possible). Employees are encouraged to utilize their own face coverings in the workplace, when possible.
- Display clear signage regarding the use of face coverings at building entrances/exits, and throughout the building.
- Encourage flexible meeting options to reduce non-essential travel. Consult [CDC Traveler's Health](#) information prior to booking work-related travel.
- Monitor and prepare for spikes in sick or absent employees. Cross-train employees to maintain critical business processes.

Communication

- Ensure communications are linguistically and culturally appropriate, and are accessible for members of the public and for employees.
- Communicate workplace policies clearly, frequently, and through various channels.
 - Consider daily team all-staff conference calls or virtual check-ins to disseminate information and policy changes.
 - Prevent stigma and discrimination in the workplace by keeping health information private in compliance with State and Federal laws.
 - Uphold stringent anti-discrimination policies, with a zero tolerance policy for any assumption of COVID-19 risk or infection status based on race or country of origin, and offer a safe way for workers to report an instance of discrimination.
 - Clearly communicate changes in policy and procedures to staff several days or more in advance whenever possible and provide a mechanism for receiving questions, suggestions, and feedback from staff.
- Utilize an Emergency Notification System and maintain updated contact information for employees.

Commuting

- When possible, allow for flexibility in working hours so employees can commute during non-peak times.
- Encourage employees to wash their hands as quickly as possible upon entering the workplace.

IV. CLEANING AND DISINFECTING

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Minimum Standards:

- Clean commonly touched surfaces in restrooms (e.g., toilet seats, doorknobs, stall handles, sinks, paper towel dispensers, soap dispensers) frequently and in accordance with CDC guidelines
- Conduct frequent cleaning and disinfection of site (at least daily and more frequently if feasible)
- Keep cleaning logs that include date, time, and scope of cleaning
- Conduct frequent disinfecting of heavy transit areas and high-touch surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, elevator buttons, staircases, vending machine, bathrooms)
- Clean shared spaces (e.g., conference rooms) between use and supply cleaning products (e.g., sanitizer, disinfecting wipes)
- In event of a positive case, shut down site for a deep cleaning and disinfecting of the workplace in accordance with current CDC guidance

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Recommended Best Practices:

- Open windows and doors to increase airflow where possible

City of Boston Operational Recommendations:

The City of Boston encourages businesses, employers, and commercial landlords to consider the following points when developing and implementing cleaning and disinfecting protocols:

- Schedule frequent cleaning of public spaces, high touch surfaces and communal areas.
 - The building should have a written cleaning plan readily available to all staff for review during work shifts that includes the following specific COVID-19 considerations:
 - All hand washing sinks must be well-stocked with soap and paper towels for handwashing and checked/restocked **at least 3 times a day**.
 - Common areas of the building should be cleaned by staff or professional cleaners **no less than two times a day**.
 - All high touch areas must be cleaned and disinfected with an EPA-approved disinfectant **at least 3 times a day**, and 5 times a day if possible. Examples of high touch areas include:
 - Doorknobs, handles, and bars at entrances/exits and bathrooms
 - Light switches and elevator buttons
 - Sink faucets and knobs
 - Toilet seats and handles
 - Stall door handles in bathrooms
 - Reception desks, counter tops and similar surfaces
 - Shared telephones, computer mice, and keyboards
 - A daily log of cleaning and disinfection should be kept on site.
 - Clean and disinfect lobbies, entryways, elevators, and cafeterias of commercial buildings larger than 50,00 square feet at least every two hours during times when the building is open to the public.

- Establish a Response Action protocol to clean spaces where there were confirmed cases of infection/exposure and notification to the workplace coordinator.
 - In event building management is notified of a positive case in a building employee or a tenant's employee, close the section of the building to which that person had access for a deep cleaning and disinfecting of the workplace in accordance with current CDC guidance.

*If you have any questions about the City of Boston's operational recommendations for businesses, employers, and commercial landlords for return-to-work strategies for office workplaces, please email **reopening@boston.gov**.*