MANAGING THE RETURN TO
THE OFFICE IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

NYC
DCAS
Citywide Administrative Services
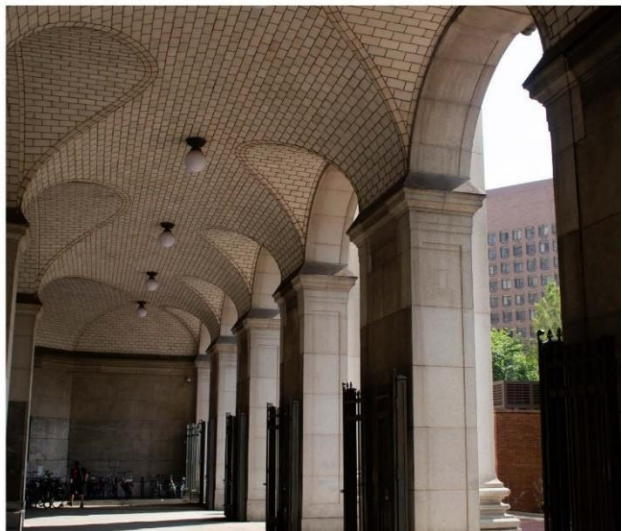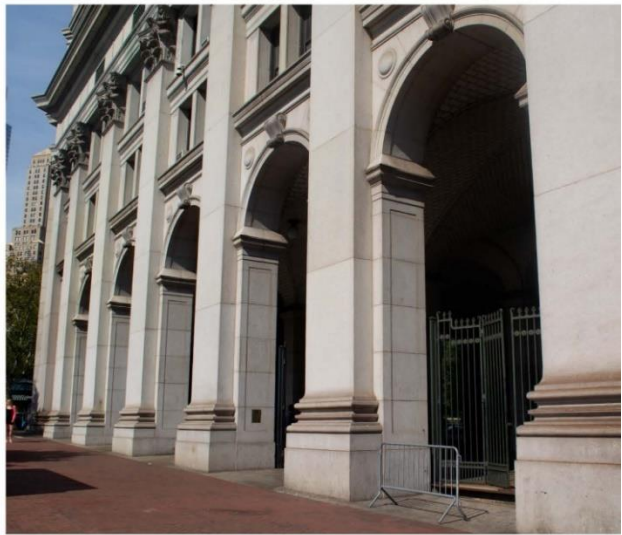
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Summary

Although phase 2 of NY Forward permits offices to re-open, the best way to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and protect employees is to continue telework policies as much as possible. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene states that there continues to be community transmission of COVID-19 in New York City (NYC), and a return to the office may result in an increase in cases. The four key actions to prevent COVID-19 transmission:

- **Stay home if sick**: stay home if you are sick unless you are leaving for essential medical care (including testing) or other essential errands.
- **Physical distancing**: stay at least 6 feet away from other people.
- **Wear a face covering**: protect those around you. You can be contagious without symptoms and spread the disease when you cough, sneeze, or even talk. A face covering may help reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- **Practice healthy hand hygiene**: wash your hands often with soap and water or use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available; clean frequently touched surfaces regularly; cover your cough or sneeze with your sleeve, not your hands.

City agencies should formulate and implement re-opening plans, which should include telework and alternative schedules. In partnership with City Hall, DOHMH, OLR and LAW, DCAS has prepared this document to provide guidance to City agencies in preparing their buildings, their workspaces, and their workforce if they must transition workers from home back to the office during the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidance is divided into four pillars that should be considered in preparing to bring the workforce back to the office:

1. **Prepare the Building**: clean, inspect and prepare the building systems, entrances, and common areas; and establish and implement new building policies and practices for controlling access, cleaning, promoting social distancing and maintaining building health.
2. **Prepare the Workspace**: establish and implement policies and protocols for promoting social distancing.
3. **Prepare the Workforce**: develop and implement policies and practices related to the return of staff (who and when), how staff will return to the office, and employee health and well-being.
4. **Communication**: establish centralized, two-way, multi-channel communications.

Please be advised that this guidance represents the current line of thinking with respect to best practices established by local, state, and federal entities, as well as private and non-profit industry experts. These recommendations are advisory in nature and should be used for planning purposes to help identify risk levels in workplaces and determine appropriate control measures. The primary resources are included at the end of this document for your further reference; and agencies are encouraged to use these resources when establishing their own policies and protocols due to the rapidly evolving nature of the pandemic.

Prepare the Building

Presented below are the building measures that should be considered as workers return to the office. These measures focus on cleaning, egress, circulation of people and air quality. Over the coming months and years, additional information and standards may emerge. As these new standards evolve, DCAS will update its recommendations accordingly.

Cleaning

All buildings with staff returning to the office should be thoroughly cleaned with enhanced cleaning for vacated and reduced occupancy locations. This will not only provide a clean work environment, but will help to allay worker concerns about returning to the office. In addition, signage should be posted and maintenance logs kept, to inform returning workers that the building has been thoroughly cleaned and new cleaning protocols have been put in place for worker health and safety.

Building Cleaning Checklist:

- Conduct a comprehensive top-to-bottom and perimeter cleaning of the building.
- Follow DOHMH's Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfection for Non-Health Care Settings to develop, follow, and maintain a cleaning plan. Use DOHMH's Cleaning and Disinfection Log Template to keep track of actions taken.
- Inventory cleaning supplies and check for compliance with recommended COVID-19 guidelines; procure supplies as needed.
- Establish protocols for cleaning after a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 following CDC guidance as practical.
- Install hand sanitizer in high traffic and public areas.
- Ensure cleaning equipment and tools are in working condition.
- Check to verify vacuum cleaners have HEPA filters as unfiltered vacuum cleaners can aerosolize a significant amount of respirable dust.
- Ensure that cleaning staff are trained on the proper use and limitations of personal protective equipment (PPE), personal hygiene protocols, mixing/applying and disposal of approved cleaning and disinfecting agents (following OSHA Hazard Communication Standard), and are properly supervised to promote ongoing quality control.
- Establish protocols for proper disposal of PPE used by building staff in accordance with government regulatory requirements.

Access and Screening

Controlling access to the building is critical in minimizing the spread of COVID-19 and to reassure workers and visitors that actions are being taken to help protect them. The level of control will depend on both the nature of the business being conducted in the building, the owner of the building and the number of tenants in the building. It is important to consider challenges for employees with mobility or sight impairments when developing, communicating, and deploying policies and protocols related to access and screening.

The guidance below applies predominately to agencies that control the entrance to their buildings. Agencies that do not control their own entrance (multi-tenant buildings where the entry to the building is managed by a third party) must ensure that, at a minimum, their building manager is complying with State and City requirements for commercial buildings; and that, in addition, your agency complies with specific guidance for employers and city agencies.

Building Access and Screening Checklist:

- For agencies that manage buildings:
    - Post notice of face covering requirements for entry and travel throughout the building.
    - Establish protocols for providing a face covering to an individual who does not have one to allow entrance into the building; procure face coverings for distribution.

> *Additional Guidance on Face Coverings:*
>
> *This measure is to ensure compliance with* Executive Order 202.17 *(and as extended) which requires "any individual who is over age two and able to medically tolerate a face-covering shall be required to cover their nose and mouth with a mask or cloth face-covering when in a public place and unable to maintain, or when not maintaining, social distance."*
>
> *In addition,* New York State *requires employees wear face coverings when customers are present.*
>
> CDC recommends *wearing a cloth face covering as a measure to contain the wearer's respiratory droplets and help protect their co-workers and members of the public. Employees should not wear cloth face coverings at work if they have trouble breathing, any inability to tolerate wearing it, or if they are unable to remove it without assistance.*
>
> NYC DOHMH *also recommends a person wear a face covering if unable to maintain at least 6 feet of distance between themselves and others. A face covering is any well-secured paper or cloth (like a bandana or scarf) that covers your nose and mouth.*
>
> *While the* EEOC has opined *that employers may require employees to wear PPE, if an employee with a disability needs an accommodation with regard to PPE, an accommodation should be provided absent an undue hardship.*

- Establish protocols and procedures to implement a mandatory health screening assessment for employees and visitors before entering the building using DOHMH's COVID-19 Symptom Screening Tool and Model Log. See the Prepare the Workforce: Health Screening section of this document for additional guidance.
- Purchase necessary equipment to implement screening protocols.

> *Additional Guidance on Health Screenings:*
>
> *New York State's* Commercial Building Management Guidelines for Employers and Employees.
>
> *New York State's* Interim Guidance for Commercial Building Management During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency.
>
> *Law Department's"* Guidelines and Checklist for Agencies Administering COVID-19 Symptoms Questions and Temperature Screening for City Employees." (see Appendix)
>
> *While the* EEOC has indicated that employers may measure employees' body temperatures, *due to the complexity of implementing such a policy, it is recommended that agencies consult with legal counsel before implementing a screening policy to ensure compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws.*

- o Train screeners to ensure effective, non-discriminatory application of screening protocols of employees and visitors.
    - o Post modified public access hours as appropriate.
    - o Post building access requirements at all entrances and on agency websites where appropriate.
    - o Review shipping and receiving protocols and modify as needed. Consider separating shipping and receiving areas from the general population; requiring personnel handling mail and parcels to wear PPE to receive parcels, mail, and other deliveries; and practicing good hand hygiene.
    - o Ensure all signage is accessible to individuals with vision disabilities to include braille, tactile, and large print. CDC has free, simple posters available to download and print, some of which are translated into different languages.
    - o Communicate all polices and protocols to tenants.
- If you do not control the entrance to your building:
    - o Work with your building management to ensure compliance with all requirements above.
    - o While employers (not building management) are responsible for screening their own employees and visitors, you should coordinate with your building management to coordinate your screening requirements wherever possible. See the Prepare the Workforce: Health Screening section of this document for additional guidance.

Social Distancing

While adherence to social distancing guidelines is dependent on individuals, there are measures building managers can put into place to encourage individual compliance.

Building Social Distancing Checklist

- Establish one-directional flow of movement at entrances, hallways, and exits, and post accordingly.
- Install 6-foot markers at entrances, elevators, and any areas where people may congregate to enforce social distancing.
- Install hygienic barriers at reception desks, service counters and other public engagement areas.
- Open stairways, additional access doors, and freight elevators for travel where possible; assign one-directional flow on stairs where possible.
- Post reminders or signage near elevators for the option of using open stairways.
- Post allowable occupancy per elevator; and, where beneficial, indicate where to stand and which direction to face in the elevator.
- Develop fire drill and evacuation protocols that allow for social distancing.

Building Systems

Buildings that have been vacated for a significant period of time will need to undergo a variety of pre-return system checks and maintenance. Guidance is provided to facilitate resuming full operations within buildings as well as adjusting building system operations on an ongoing basis.

Building Systems Checklist:

General

- Verify the operation of mechanical systems and restore all sequences, set points, and schedules modified during the rollback of operations.

- Evaluate the building and its mechanical and life safety systems to determine if the building is ready for occupancy. Check for hazards associated with prolonged facility shutdown such as mold growth, rodents or pests, or issues with stagnant water systems; and take appropriate remedial actions.

HVAC

- For building heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems that have been shut down or on setback, review new construction start-up guidance provided in ASHRAE Standard 180-2018, Standard Practice for the Inspection and Maintenance of Commercial Building HVAC Systems.

- Flush building with fresh air based on the design of the air system. If possible, set to leading sustainability standards such as LEED, BREEAM, and WELL for a minimum of 24 hours and ideally for 48 to 72 hours before reoccupation.

- Increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, and other methods. Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety or health risk for current or subsequent occupants, including children (e.g., allowing outdoor environmental contaminants including carbon monoxide, particulate matter, molds, or pollens into the building).

Considerations for increasing fresh intake:

- *Simple interventions using existing controls include increasing the minimum outdoor air damper open position or lowering demand-controlled ventilation (DCV) thresholds.*
- *Air handler design, state of repair, and controllability issues may impact the ability to meet fresh air guidelines. Some air handlers lack exhaust capability, have inoperable or undersized dampers, or have limited automatic controls. These factors make increasing and controlling ventilation rates more difficult and labor-intensive.*
- *Increasing ventilation will be more difficult on cold winter days where there is risk of freezing AHU coils, particularly for air handlers that lack pre-heat systems. Increasing pre-heating to support higher outdoor air intake will also increase energy consumption.*
- *Increasing ventilation rates could significantly increase energy consumption and costs. Using variable frequency drives (VFDs), enforcing seasonal set points, and undertaking load management could help mitigate energy impacts.*
- *Some technical guidance suggests utilizing 100% outside air intake and running systems 24/7. While operating at these extremes may be beneficial for spaces that are continuously occupied and pose acute transmission risks, such as hospital clean rooms, the practice may not be necessary or feasible for many workspaces.*
- *Operating HVAC systems far beyond their design loads could degrade system performance, exacerbate impacts of deferred maintenance and system imbalances, cause malfunctions requiring emergency repairs, and jeopardize building operators' ability to maintain comfortable temperatures, particularly during hot and humid summer days and winter cold spells.*
- *Disrupting well calibrated sequences and disabling demand controls could also undermine prior efforts and investments to retro-commission and retrofit buildings in support of the City's greenhouse gas reduction goals.*

- Replace air filters with the highest efficiency rated filter recommended by the manufacturer. If possible, utilize a Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) of greater than 13 (ASHRAE Guidance).

> *Additional guidance on improving air quality:*
>
> - *Upgrading air filters to higher MERV ratings is generally feasible in most buildings.*
> - *Higher MERV filters generally require more frequent changing unless pre-filters can be installed which can increase operations & maintenance to costs.*
> - *Failure to change higher MERV filters will diminish efficacy and impair HVAC operations.*
> - *Higher MERV filters may reduce airflow, potentially causing temperature control problems on days with challenging weather. This should be monitored as needed.*
> - *UV treatment technologies, installed in air handlers or within occupied spaces, and portable 7HEPA filters should be considered in instances where additional risk mitigation is needed. Examples may include spaces with vulnerable populations or unavoidably high-density occupancy.*

- Maintain relative humidity levels at 40 to 60% if possible, as lower relative humidity levels could facilitate virus transmission.

> *Considerations for maintaining humidity levels:*
>
> - *Many City buildings lack the humidification and dehumidification systems that are required to maintain relative humidity levels at 40 to 60%.*
> - *In this case, buildings may consider installing portable humidification systems during winter periods to maintain desired humidity levels. If using humidification systems, buildings will need to establish a plan to monitor mold conditions that may arise from added moisture in insulated ductwork and other areas of the building.*
> - *Building operators may consider installing humidity sensors in buildings that lack sensing equipment to aid in managing humidity levels.*

- Generate clean-to-less-clean air movement by re-evaluating the positioning of supply and exhaust air diffusers and/or dampers and adjusting zone supply and exhaust flow rates to establish measurable pressure differentials (ASHRAE Guidance).
- Develop procedures and protocols to monitor building energy system efficiency (e.g., air flow, # air exchanges, pressure differentials, CO_2 levels) and efficacy (e.g., biological monitoring). Consider spacing, frequency and calibration requirements for monitoring equipment.
- It is important to also monitor the impact of HVAC strategies closely on energy consumption and cost. Wherever possible, seek to offset increases in energy use due to HVAC strategies with savings generated through other measures that will not impact the health and safety of building occupants. This will ensure that the City stays on track to meet its aggressive greenhouse gas reduction goals.
- Refer to ASHRAE for additional HVAC strategies to employ when operating the building in a pandemic and make sure to consider feasibility and fit for NYC context.

Building Management Systems

- Update building management system (BMS) programming to incorporate HVAC strategies to reduce virus transmission.

- Automate the control sequences applied as "Epidemic Mode" operation that can be manually selected by the operator.

- If automation is not possible, develop manual procedures and ensure the appropriate staff are trained on and know where to locate "Epidemic Mode" SOPs.

- Many City buildings do not have sophisticated or fully functional building management systems to implement measures. In these facilities, operators may need to manually override existing control systems and sequences. See HVAC section for important considerations.

Water Systems

- Review DOHMH's Guidance for Returning Building Water Systems to Service After Prolonged Shutdown.

- Work with water treatment service provider to ensure chemical levels are within defined ranges for cooling towers, closed water systems, water features, etc.

- Ensure drinking water systems are current with maintenance schedules.

- Post reminders for proper hand hygiene at water fountains and sinks.

- Consider replacing manually operated systems with motion-sensor drinking water systems.

Restrooms

- Ensure restrooms are under negative pressure.

- Equip toilet seats with covers and install appropriate signage to prevent aerosolization during flushing.

- Run toilet exhaust systems continuously during periods of occupancy and a minimum of two hours before and after occupancy.

Elevators

- Post occupancy allowances and elevator protocol at all elevator banks and within each elevator.

- Ensure regular cleaning schedule of buttons.

- Cover buttons with anti-microbial plastic to protect the electronic components from being damaged by cleaning supplies.

Prepare the Workspace

As with the building preparation section, this section focuses on the minimum measures that should be considered as people return to work and will continue to evolve as new information and standards emerge. According the Phase II NYS guidance for commercial building management, the total number of occupants is limited to 50% of the maximum occupancy for a particular areas as set by the certificate of occupancy (this includes visitors, building staff, guests, etc.).

Social Distancing

While adherence to social distancing guidelines is dependent on individuals, there are some measures building managers can put into place to encourage individual compliance. As in other sections, the guidance suggested here is the starting point as people return. As conditions change, so will guidance and updates to workplace policies. Adaptations will be needed in various City workplaces depending on risk of exposure and workspace condition. For now, the six-foot rule of social distance should be adhered to in the office.

Workspace Social Distancing Checklist:

Open Workspaces

- Establish workstation/desktop sharing guidelines including whether sharing will be permitted, for what duration and before and after cleaning requirements.
- Evaluate workspaces to determine your maximum occupancy rate while adhering to social distancing. There are three primary scenarios to consider, each of which has different costs and benefits:

Scenario	Time	Level of Effort	Cost	Occupancy Rate
1. No change to existing layout or furniture	Immediate	Low	$	Lowest
2. No change except to add protective barriers	1 day – 1 month Access to product and labor	Medium	$$	Medium
3. Layout and furniture are modified, including adding protective barriers	1 month – 6 months Time for design and approvals Access to product and labor	High	$$$	Highest

Under Scenario 1, the following modifications can be made:

- Remove desks, monitors, or chairs at desks, tables, and seating that will not be used.
- Use alternating desks.
- Identify assignable seats for employees to ensure 6-foot separation from main corridors and adjacent workstations.
- Ensure access in and out on secondary aisles does not encroach on the clearance of workstations.
- Reduce the overall use of workstations to ensure appropriate physical distancing.
- Block off non-compliant areas.
- Consider the direction of airflow from HVAC supply vents. If possible, avoid locating staff near HVAC supply vents to mitigate risk of downwind transmission through aerosols or increase necessary protective distance near HVAC supply vents.

Scenario 1 Example:
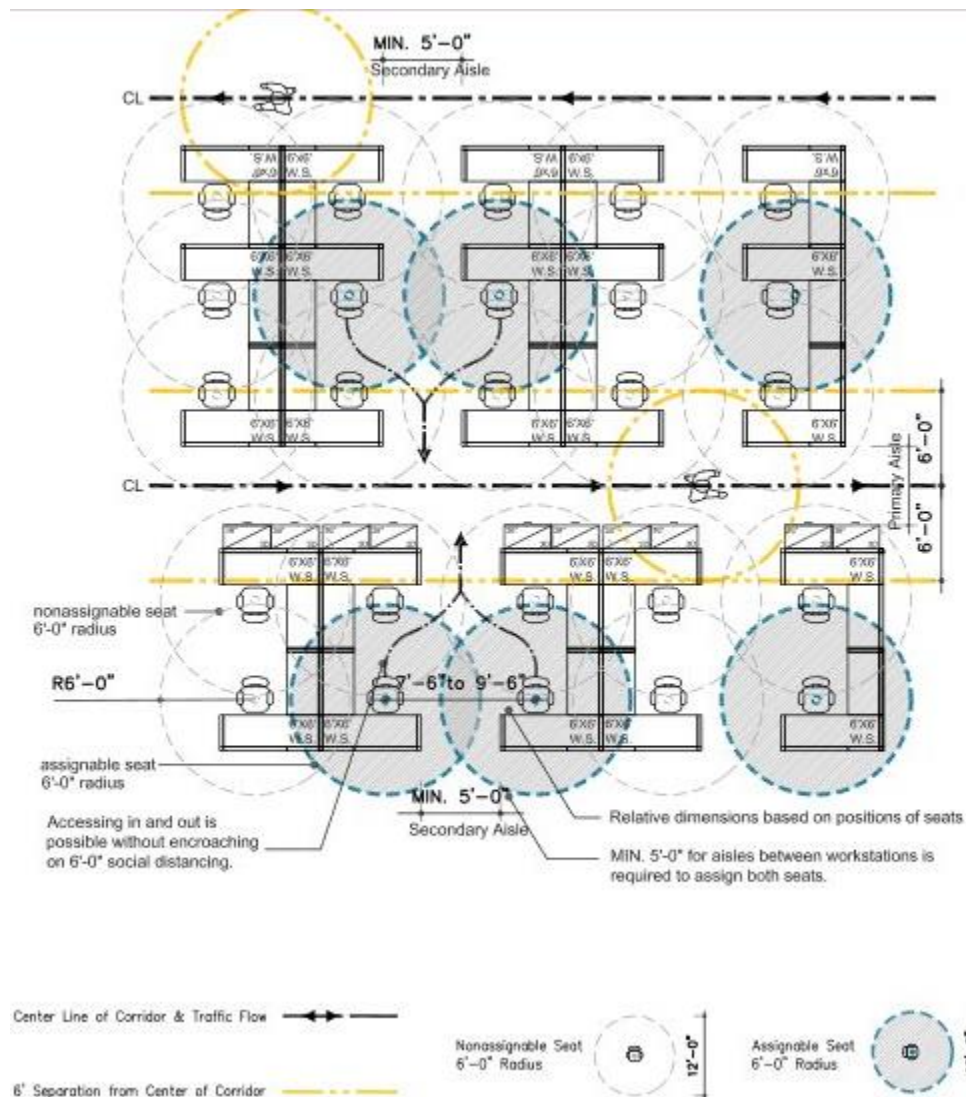
Under Scenario 2, the following modifications in addition to those in Scenario 1 can be made:

- Remove workstations.
- Add screens (plexiglass or other solid material) in front, beside and behind people.

Scenario 2 Example:
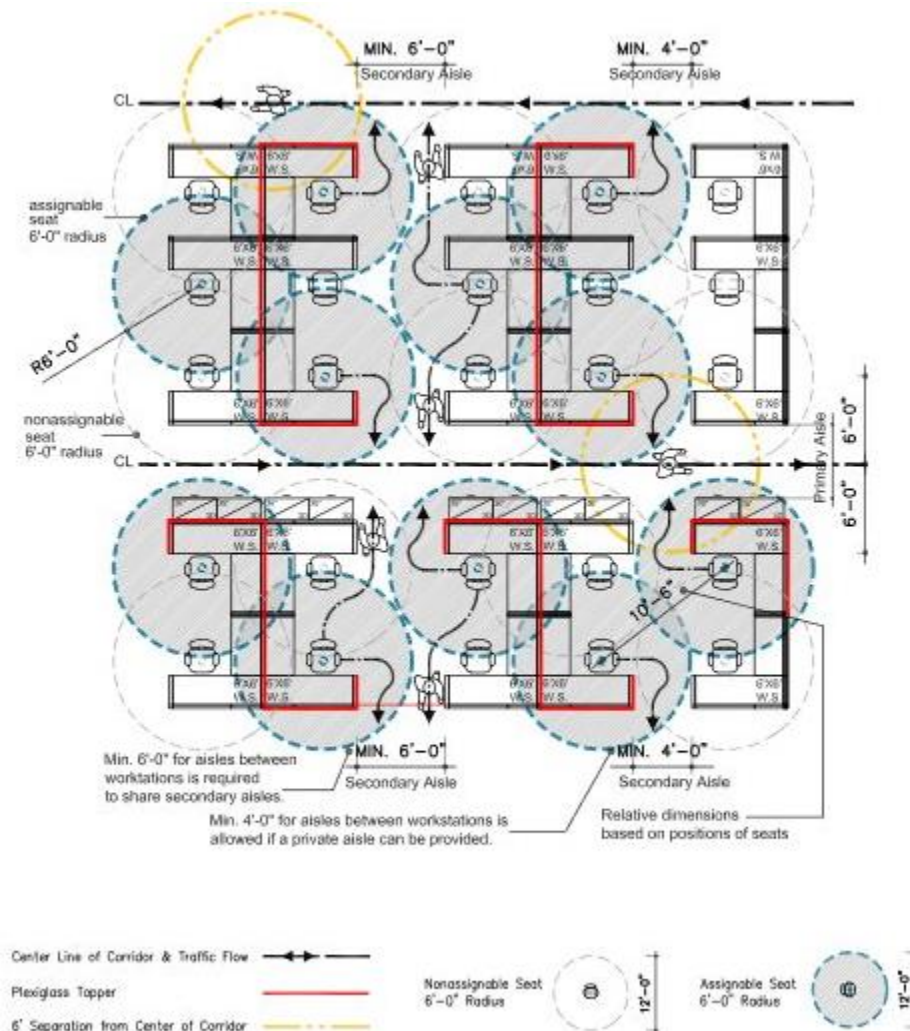
Under Scenario 3, in addition to the modifications in Scenarios 1 and 2:

- Reconfigure the placement of workstations to reduce sitting face to face without a barrier.
- Increase the distances between workstations and desks.
- Turn workstations to 90-degree angles to prevent workers from working directly across or behind one another.

Scenario 3 Examples: Workstation reconfiguration options to help minimize the risk of infection
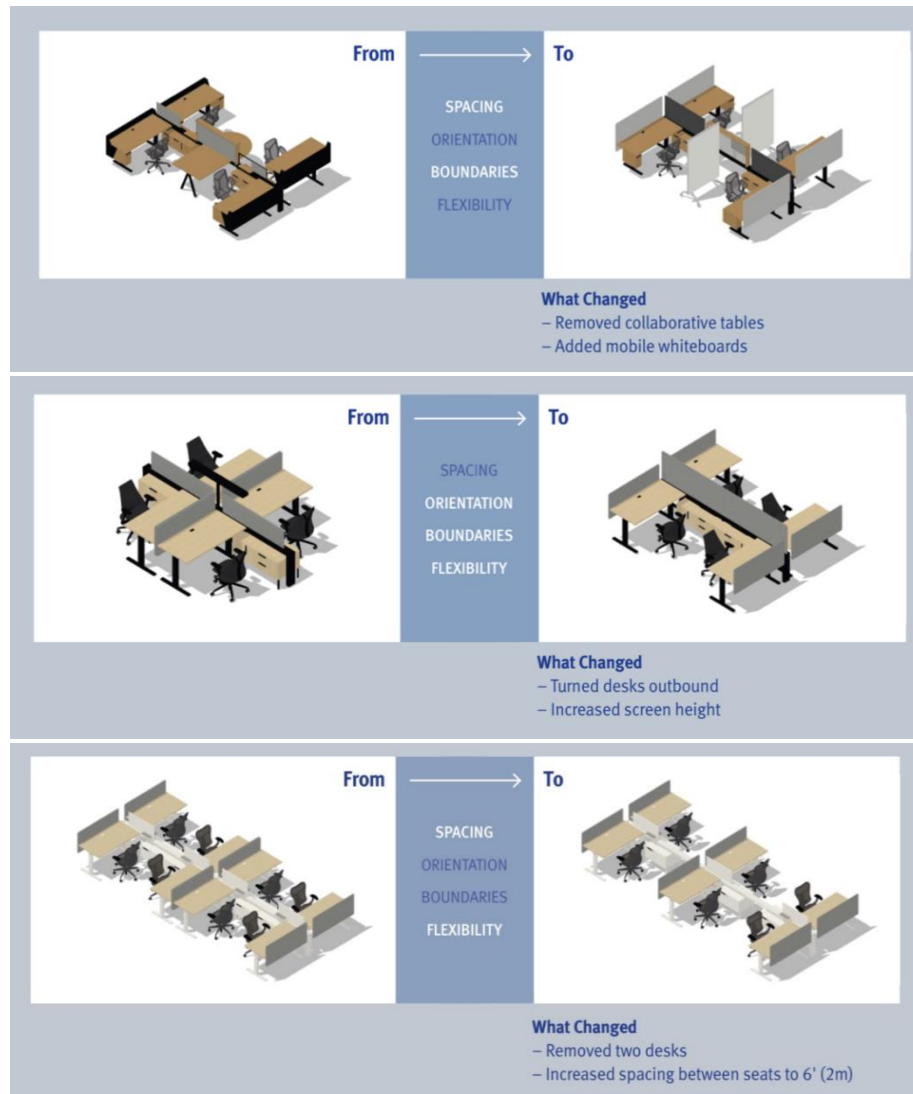
(Source: Herman Miller)

Reception Areas

- Control access to the office via signage for phone-in entry.
- Install physical barriers (e.g. plexiglass or similar materials) at reception and security desks.
- Rearrange or take away seating in the reception area to manage social distancing.
- Remove pens and paper sign-in and have receptionists log guests. If this is not feasible, require visitors to use their own pens or request a single use pen if needed; or set out holders for clean and used pens and sanitize the used pens before moving back to the clean holder.
- Keep the hand sanitizer dispensers in plain view or if a dispenser is not located in a reception area, set out bottles of hand sanitizer.

Shared Spaces

- Establish the maximum occupancy allowed for shared spaces for effective social distancing (e.g., conference rooms, huddle spaces, pantries, break rooms, copy rooms). Remove chairs that would allow greater occupancy; and install signage with occupancy limits. (Rule of Thumb for Occupancy: 1 person/100 SF)
- Decommission and repurpose large gathering spaces. Possible use is storage for unused furniture and temporary sanitation stations.
- Re-adjust the spacing of ancillary furniture in public areas, shared spaces, and break out areas.
- Mark furniture such as sofas and bench seating for single usage unless 6-foot distancing is possible.
- Use a portion of your largest conference room for chair storage, until the need for social distancing has diminished.
- Prohibit shared use of small conference or break rooms by more than one person.
- Small and/or narrow amenity spaces (such as pantries) should be either closed off or be limited to one person at a time.
- Prior to modifying use, review aspects of shared space used by people with disabilities, for religious reasons, medical needs, or for lactation purposes. For example:
  - Closure of the breakroom could restrict access to a refrigerator for someone needing to keep their medication or breastmilk refrigerated.
  - Use of lactation rooms may require awareness to immediately clean before the next individual use.
  - Timing and use of space designated for prayer may need to be modified to ensure social distancing.
- Establish break room, vending machine access, and eating protocols. Minimize touchpoints by removing coffee pots and similar shared equipment.
- Where training is virtual and these rooms remain empty, repurpose staff into these spaces; or use rooms to temporarily store ancillary furniture that has been removed from other areas.
- All signage should be accessible to individuals with vision disabilities to include braille, tactile, and large print.
- Establish a methodology for monitoring occupancy/density. Consider adding sensors to quantify utilization of spaces.

Office Circulation & Reducing Touch Points

- Use tape or other visual cues to direct one-way traffic flow and suggest appropriate distance between employees along circulation pathways.

  The diagram below shows an example of one-directional flow along corridors and among workstations.
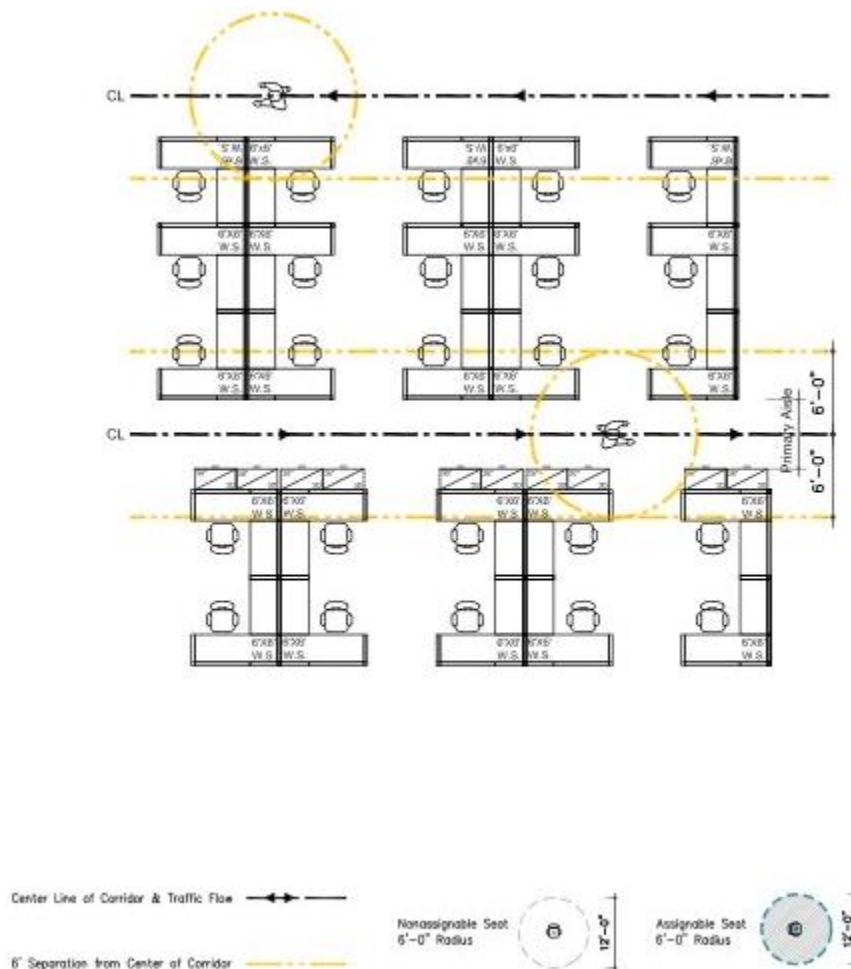
- Use visual cues to remind employees of high-touch areas such as light switches, water fountains, printers, etc.
- Encourage printer-free office to reduce lines and handling of printers; disable or move shared equipment that is less than 6 feet from a workstation or consider removing workstations within 6 feet of a shared printer, as may be appropriate.
- As allowed by FDNY, building codes, and building operating procedures, keep doors open where possible to promote air circulation, and reduce door handle touching; and disable door access keypads.

Cleaning

While cleaning predominately falls within the Prepare the Building pillar, there are measures that can be taken within the workspace to facilitate and augment cleaning.

Workspace Cleaning Checklist:

- Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workspace, such as workstations, keyboards, telephones, handrails, printer/copiers, drinking fountains, and doorknobs.

> *Additional Guidance:*
>
> *For disinfection, most common, EPA-registered, household disinfectants should be effective as well as* diluted household bleach solutions *or alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol. A list of* products that are EPA-approved for use against the virus that causes COVID-19 *is available on the EPA website. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method, and contact time).*

- If you are a tenant, review building cleaning protocols and request changes to cleaning scope or additional services, if necessary.
- If you are a landlord, review agency occupancy plans to ensure building services meet the needs of the tenant agencies.
- Make cleaning highly visible so employees are assured that spaces are being cleaned at least once a day.
- Institute clean desk policy that requires employees to remove all items from the desk at the end of the day to facilitate regular cleaning of work surfaces.
- Make cleaning wipes and sanitizer accessible; post signage requiring employees to clean before and after use of shared spaces.
- Deploy hand sanitizer bottles in break rooms, conference rooms, elevator lobbies, and other high traffic and common areas where hand sanitizer dispensers have not been installed.
- Increase frequency of cleaning appliances, such as refrigerators and microwaves.
- Remove shared items and equipment from common rooms.
- Use no-touch waste receptacles when possible.
- Disable touch screens on shared devices.

Prepare the Workforce

Preparing the workforce means developing policies and practices related to the return of staff – which staff will return, how staff will return, policies with respect to working remotely, and steps to protect employee health and well-being. **Agencies should continue to allow teleworking whenever possible.** If onsite work is required, alternative work schedules should be considered to alleviate density in the workplace. Below are some key questions to consider:

- Why does this employee/role need to come to the office?
- What activity or responsibility requires their physical presence?
- How can the agency enable this activity to be done at home in whole or in part?
- If the employee **must** come into the office, can they come in for a limited time?

As with the preparation of the building and of the workspace, planning for the return of the workforce should be strategic, with the vision of how best to fulfill the agency's mission and objectives while creating a safe and supportive environment for the staff. A successful plan will include a communication strategy that focuses on consistency and timeliness, considers frequency, and allows for a multi-channel approach. For example, this approach can include written communication shared via email or posted on the agency's website where employees have access, virtual orientation and information sessions where employees are able to join via phone or computer and ask questions, as well as through social media accounts.

In consideration of concerns employees may have once they receive confirmation that they will be returning to the office, agencies should share and make easily accessible, all employee resources the City offers to promote health and wellness. In addition to sharing information regarding the Employee Assistance Program, agency personnel representatives should also familiarize themselves with the citywide and agency-specific programs offered by Work Well NYC and Thrive NYC.

Return to Work Guidance

Agencies should develop return to work protocols and share with returning staff, prior to their return so staff know what to expect.

Return to Work Guidance Checklist:

- Face covering requirement.

> *Additional Guidance on Face Coverings:*
>
> *This measure is to ensure compliance with Executive Order 202.17 (and as extended) which requires "any individual who is over age two and able to medically tolerate a face-covering shall be required to cover their nose and mouth with a mask or cloth face-covering when in a public place and unable to maintain, or when not maintaining, social distance."*
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> *In addition, New York State requires employees wear face coverings when customers are present.*
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> *NYC DOHMH also recommends a person wear a face covering if unable to maintain at least 6 feet of distance between themselves and others. A face covering is any well-secured paper or cloth (like a bandana or scarf) that covers your nose and mouth.*
>
> *While the EEOC has opined that employers may require employees to wear PPE, if an employee with a disability needs an accommodation with regard to PPE, an accommodation should be provided absent an undue hardship.*

- Employee safety practices.
  - Remember the four key actions to prevent COVID-19 transmission:
    - Stay home if sick: Stay home if you are sick unless you are leaving for essential medical care (including testing) or other essential errands.
    - Physical distancing: stay at least 6 feet away from other people.
    - Wear a face covering: protect those around you. You can be contagious without symptoms and spread the disease when you cough, sneeze, or even talk. A face covering may help reduce the spread of COVID-19.
    - Practice healthy hand hygiene: Wash your hands often with soap and water or use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available; clean frequently touched surfaces regularly; cover your cough or sneeze with your sleeve, not your hands.

> *Considerations for safety practices (also see* NYC DOHMH Guidance*):*
>
> - *Always maintain physical distancing of at least 6 feet.*
> - *Frequently wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.*
> - *Use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.*
> - *No handshaking, hugs, and fist bumps.*
> - *Limit in-person meetings.*
> - *Avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth.*
> - *Limit use and occupancy of elevators.*
> - *Use outdoor seating areas and social distancing for any small group activities such as lunches, breaks, and meetings.*

- Guidance on in-person meetings limitations and the use of video conferencing even if all meeting members are in the same office.
- Childcare and dependent care policies.
- Resources and information to facilitate commuting.

> *Some travel options for consideration:*
>
> - *Access-a-ride information for people with disabilities who qualify for the program*
> - *Parking availability near the respective worksite*
> - *Bicycle parking space availability*
> - *Citi Bike program for essential workers*

- Travel policies, limiting employee work travel to only essential travel.
- Leave policies.
- Employee training and information on COVID-19 risk factors, protective measures, cleaning, and disinfection products used in the workplace following OSHA Hazard Communication Standards.
- Accessibility considerations. For more details see the Accessibility Considerations for a Return to Work Plan developed by the Office of Citywide Equity and Inclusion (see Appendix).
- Equitable access for people with disabilities.

- Reasonable accommodations related to PPE, breathing, hearing disabilities, and CDC-identified pre-existing conditions.

> *For example:*
>
> - *Individuals with a hearing disability may be accommodated by holding communications via email or video given that co-workers' face masks prevent lip reading or co-workers may use clear masks, as appropriate.*
>
> - *Clear face masks may also be used to accommodate individuals who indicate they have a breathing disability for which a mask respirator poses difficulty breathing.*
>
> - *Those who wear hearing aids and glasses may find it difficult to have another item behind the ear and that may require a reasonable accommodation assessment for an adequate mask.*

- Alternative work arrangements outside of a reasonable accommodation process.
- FAQs related to reasonable accommodations.
- List of resources (EEO Office, EAP, WorkWell, ThriveNYC).
- Establish policy for monitoring absenteeism and non-compliance with return to work policy.

Return to Work Scheduling

Alternative work schedules must be considered to alleviate density in the workplace. There are various phasing and alternative work schedules that may be implemented based on the specific needs, capabilities, and limitations of the agency. When determining the schedules for returning to work, agencies should take the following considerations into account:

- The workspace should be reviewed so that social distancing guidelines are followed when determining workstation use.
- Supervisors should ensure that the method used to determine the work schedule is fair and equitable, and to the extent possible, employee's preferences are considered.
- Schedules should be pre-determined to ensure continuity and to manage expectations for both the supervisor and employee, as well as agency customers.
- The employee and his or her supervisor should complete the "Alternative Work Arrangement Agreement" (See Appendix) form to reach a mutual understanding of duties and scheduling.
- Work schedules should align with business needs and should not contravene negotiated collective bargaining agreements. Implementation of a new alternative work schedule for represented employees should be coordinated with the Office of Labor Relations.

Scheduling Options (see Appendix for more guidance):

- Phased return:
  - Employees should be returned to the workplace in phases.
  - Your phased plan should consider the Mayor's directives, and your operational priorities.

Examples of schedule modifications:

Telework
- Agencies develop a telework policy to allow for critical work to be performed while maintaining social distancing protocols.

Flexible Work Days
- Agencies allow for employees to have flexible regular days off, for a schedule that allows staff to handle responsibilities that have changed during the crisis.

Compressed Work Schedule
- Agencies allow employees to work a traditional 35- or 40-hour work week in less than 5 days.

Flexible Arrival
- Agencies will allow for a wider window for arrival for staff to begin their workday

- Teleworking:
  - DCAS has established telework guidelines (see Appendix) to allow for critical work to be performed outside of the worksite.
  - Agencies should review the telework procedures put into place during the pandemic and re-evaluate periodically, as appropriate.
- Flexible arrivals:
  - Allows employees to commute to work at different times, resulting in less congestion for public transport, entrance points, and elevators.
  - A flexible arrival schedule allows for a wider window for arrival for staff to begin their work day, for example between the hours of 7 am and 10 am. Arrival times should be within at least a 30 minute flexible band to allow for employees to pass through COVID-19 related entry procedures such as health screening assessments and social distancing in elevators and stairwells; and to allow for additional time needed for commuting on mass transit systems.
  - Agencies are encouraged to use discretion in adjusting reporting times in CityTime to account for significant delays or lines while entering a building.
- Flexible workdays:
  - Allow for a work schedule that allows employees to have flexible days off (e.g. granting Mondays and Tuesdays off instead of the weekend) so that they can handle responsibilities that may have changed since the beginning of the crisis. Most titles allow for work to be performed any day of the week.
  - Flexible workdays will alleviate crowding in offices and allow for office space to be utilized while maintaining social distancing requirements. Such an arrangement will also minimize congestion when entering work sites.
  - Flexible workdays will assist families with childcare and eldercare planning.
- Compressed work week: a regular 35- or 40-hour work week is worked in less than five days.
  - Allow employees to commute to work at different times, on fewer days, resulting in less congestion for public transport.
  - Compressed work week proposals need to address how: service levels will be maintained; schedules will be coordinated amongst staff; effective communication will be maintained over the longer schedule; and overtime will be curtailed and/or eliminated.

- o An employee's job should be evaluated before determining if a compressed schedule is appropriate.
- o Work that must be performed at specific times of the day may not be appropriate for a compressed schedule.
- o Compressed work schedules may be the subject of bargaining, and agencies should consult with the Office of Labor Relations to determine the feasibility of establishing compressed work schedules.

Health Screening

Agencies are required to use DOHMH's COVID-19 Symptom Screening Tool and Model Log to implement a mandatory health screening assessment for employees and visitors. Agencies must document that they have reviewed the responses to these daily health screening assessments. Agencies are prohibited from keeping records of employee health data (e.g. temperature data). Tenants are responsible for screening their own employees and visitors, but tenants and building management should coordinate to facilitate screening. It is important to consider challenges for employees with mobility or sight impairments when developing, communicating, and deploying policies and protocols related to access and screening.

Health Screening Checklist:

- Using DOHMH's COVID-19 Symptom Screening Tool and Model Log, develop applicable procedures and protocols for conducting employee health screenings before entry to the workplace.
- While not required, if your agency decides to include temperature screenings for employees, ensure all protocols and procedures follow the Law Department's guidance (see Appendix).
- The screening can be conducted remotely or in person. If screening will be conducted in person, ensure screening staff are a trained supervisory-level employee or health care professional; and if the screening involves contact, ensure staff wear appropriate PPE including, at least, face covering and gloves.
- Purchase necessary equipment to implement screening protocols.

> *Additional Guidance:*
>
> *New York State's* Commercial Building Management Guidelines for Employers and Employees
>
> *New York State's* Interim Guidance for Commercial Building Management During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency*.*
>
> *Law Department's" Guidelines and Checklist for Agencies Administering COVID-19 Symptoms Questions and Temperature Screening for City Employees." (see Appendix)*
>
> *While the* EEOC has indicated that employers may measure employees' body temperatures*, due to the complexity of implementing such a policy, it is recommended that agencies consult with legal counsel before implementing a screening policy to ensure compliance with all applicable federal, state and local laws.*

Managing COVID-19 Symptoms and Cases in the Workplace

- Establish a protocol for when an employee exhibits symptoms on the job, becomes sick, tests positive, or a household member or other close contact tests positive. Refer to Health and Hospital's Test and Trace Corps and DOHMH's FAQs.

- NYS guidance requires employers to notify public health officials if they learn of an employee who is a confirmed or suspected case. If employers wish to report directly to public health authorities, they can email the NYC Test and Trace Corps at CovidEmployerReport@nychhc.org. Please note that the NYC Test and Trace program will only follow up on confirmed cases and will not reply to reports received through this email. NYC is performing contact tracing based on confirmed cases reported through a robust electronic laboratory reporting system.

CDC Guidance suggests the following measures:

- *Employees with symptoms at work should immediately be separated and sent home.*
- *Establish procedures for safely transporting anyone sick to their home or to a healthcare facility.*
- *Sick employees should follow CDC-recommended steps. Employees should not return to work until the criteria to discontinue home isolation are met, in consultation with their healthcare provider.*
- *Close areas visited by the ill persons. Open outside doors and windows and use ventilating fans to increase air circulation in the area. Follow CDC recommendations for cleaning and disinfection as practical and appropriate for the conditions.*
- *Perform enhanced cleaning and disinfection after anyone suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 has been in the workplace.*
- *Inform those who have had close contact to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay home and self-monitor for symptoms, and to follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop. If a person does not have symptoms follow appropriate CDC guidance for home isolation.*
- *Sick employees should not return to work until they have met New York State's criteria to discontinue home isolation.*

- Purchase PPE for distribution to staff.

- Develop protocols to ensure that health related information about individuals who are identified or self-identify with COVID-19 symptoms is maintained confidential and only shared with employees who are designated with a need to know.

Communication

Communication is key to keeping the workforce informed and engaged. Timely and consistent communication will also support your efforts to effectively address employee concerns as they arise. All measures taken in the areas of the building, the workspace and the workforce need to be communicated across a variety of mediums. It is recommended that communications be centralized to ensure all individuals receive the same message.

Communication Checklist:

- Consider hosting staff orientations and Q&A sessions with Human Resources and Offices of Safety and Health via video conferencing before staff return to work.
- Establish centralized, two-way communication to ensure a trusting and transparent culture for workforce, visitors, tenants, and vendors.
- Use a wide range of communication channels and materials—email, employee portals, text messages, video, virtual live events, posters/digital displays, and others.
- Post signs and reminders at entrances and in strategic places providing instruction on hand hygiene, COVID-19 symptoms, and cough and sneeze etiquette. CDC and DOMHM have print materials available to download, CDC link, DOHMH link, some of which are translated into different languages.
- Provide a return to office letter from the Commissioner. See sample from the Office of Citywide Equity and Inclusion Guidance (see Appendix).
- Provide information on what actions have been taken, new policies and protocols that have been put in place, and future changes to expect.
- Make messaging accessible to all by providing alternate formats, including braille, and ensuring that videos or online materials meet ADA standards and are available in American Sign Language (ASL).
- Prepare and disseminate information and trainings on COVID-19 risk factors and protective measures.
- Post the actions and measures that have been taken for each building in the lobby to alleviate concerns.
- If the return to the office is phased, communicate what units/services are coming back first and why; and what the longer-term plan is.
- Remind employees that City resources are available to them, including leave options, union benefits (including financial planning), confidential discussions with the agency's equal employment opportunity (EEO) officer for reasonable accommodations, health and wellness services provided by the WorkWell NYC and the EAP, and benefits offered by their health care providers.
- Create and test communication systems for employees for self-reporting and notification of exposures and closures.
- If contractors are employed in the workplace, develop plans to communicate with the contracting company regarding modifications to work processes and requirements for the contractors to prevent transmission of COVID-19.

Resources

Below are links to the resources used to guide this document. Inquiries can also be made directly to the CDC on the web at CDC-INFO or by calling the CDC at 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636), TTY: 1-888-232-6348.

General Guidance		
The White House	Guidelines for Opening Up America Again	https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/#phase-one
Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)	Employer Information for Office Buildings	https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/office-buildings.html
	CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers (COVID-19)	https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html
	CDC General Business Frequently Asked Questions	https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/general-business-faq.html
	Coronavirus (COVID-19)	https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html
The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)	NIOSH COVID-19 Workplace Safety and Health Topic	https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/emres/2019_ncov.html
U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM)	Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)	https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/covid-19/
Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)	Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19	https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf
	OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard	https://www.osha.gov/dsg/hazcom/
U.S. Department of Treasury	The CARES Act Provides Assistance for State and Local Governments	https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/cares/state-and-local-governments
New York State	Regional Guidelines for Re-Opening New York	https://www.governor.ny.gov/new-york-forward/regional-guidelines-re-opening-new-york#phased-plan-to-re-open-new-york
	Interim Guidance for Commercial Building Management During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency	https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/commercial-building-management-master-guidance.pdf
	Commercial Building Management Guidelines for Employers and Employees	https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/BuildingManagementSummaryGuidance.pdf
NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene	COVID-19: General Guidance for Businesses and Other Non-Health Care Settings	https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/novel-coronavirus-faq-for-businesses.pdf
Cushman & Wakefield	Recovery Readiness: A How-To Guide for Re-Opening Your Workplace	https://www.cushmanwakefield.com/en/insights/covid-19/recovery-readiness-a-how-to-guide-for-reopening-your-workplace

General Guidance		
World Health Organization	Coronavirus	https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1
CBC Canada	Inside Taiwan during COVID-19: How the country kept schools and businesses open throughout pandemic	https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/taiwan-covid-19-lessons-1.5505031
Brookings Webinar	Webinar: A short- and long-term approach to COVID-19	https://www.brookings.edu/events/webinar-a-short-and-long-term-approach-to-covid-19/
The New York Times	How Coronavirus Infected Some, but Not All, in a Restaurant	https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/20/health/airflow-coronavirus-restaurants.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article
Harvard Healthy Buildings Program	A five-layered approach for employers and building managers as they consider how to safely reopen their establishments	https://forhealth.org/

The Building		
NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene	COVID-19: FAQ for Residential and Commercial Buildings	https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/covid-19-residential-buildings-faq.pdf
Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)	Cleaning and Disinfection for Community Facilities	https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html
American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE)	Guidance for Building Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic	https://www.ashrae.org/news/ashraejournal/guidance-for-building-operations-during-the-covid-19-pandemic
	ASHRAE Offers COVID-19 Building Readiness/Reopening Guidance	https://www.ashrae.org/about/news/2020/ashrae-offers-covid-19-building-readiness-reopening-guidance
	ASHRAE Standard 180-2018, Standard Practice for the Inspection and Maintenance of Commercial Building HVAC Systems	https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/office-buildings.html
	ASHRAE Position Document on Infectious Aerosols	https://www.ashrae.org/file%20library/about/position%20documents/pd_infectiousaerosols_2020.pdf
	ASHRAE Filtration/Disinfection (Online Guidance)	https://www.ashrae.org/technical-resources/filtration-disinfection#mechanical
Building Owners & Managers Association International (BOMA)	Getting Back to Work: Preparing Buildings for Re-Entry Amid COVID-19	https://boma.informz.net/BOMA/data/images/Getting%20Back%20To%20Work%20Preparing%20Buildings%20for%20Re%20Entry.pdf

The Building		
International Facility Management Association (IFMA)	Health and Safety Resources to Safeguard Against Infection	http://community.ifma.org/knowledge_library/b/news_and_updates/posts/health-and-safety-resources-to-safeguard-against-infection
JAMA Insights	Turbulent Gas Clouds and Respiratory Pathogen Emissions: Potential Implications for Reducing Transmission of COVID-19	https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2763852
International Journal of Hygiene and Environmental Health, 2019	Impact of Hygiene Intervention on Virus Spread in an Office Building	https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330396084_Impact_of_a_hygiene_intervention_on_virus_spread_in_an_office_building
Buildings.com	Smarter Facility Management 3 Tips for Managing an Empty Building During COVID-19	https://www.buildings.com/news/industry-news/articleid/22231/title/managing-empty-building-covid-19
Berkeley Lab	Using Ultraviolet Germicidal Lights for Air Cleaning	https://iaqscience.lbl.gov/air-uv
American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA)	Workplace Cleaning for COVID-19 Guidance Document	https://aiha-assets.sfo2.digitaloceanspaces.com/AIHA/resources/Guidance-Documents/Workplace-Cleaning-for-COVID-19-Guidance-Document_FINAL.pdf
United State Environmental Protection Agency	List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2	https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2

The Workspace		
American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA)	Reopening: Guidance for General Office Settings	https://aiha-assets.sfo2.digitaloceanspaces.com/AIHA/resources/Guidance-Documents/Reopening-Guidance-for-General-Office-Settings_GuidanceDocument.pdf
Cushman & Wakefield	6 Feet Office	https://www.cushmanwakefield.com/en/netherlands/six-feet-office
CBRE	COVID 19 and The Future of Furniture	https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/e894f327/files/uploaded/Future%20of%20Furniture%20post%20COVID%2019_CBRE%20Furniture%20Advisory.pdf
	Return to work strategies around COVID-19	*Working Session*
Vox	This is the end of the office as we know it	https://www.vox.com/recode/2020/4/14/21211789/coronavirus-office-space-work-from-home-design-architecture-real-estate

The Workspace		
Fast Company	Our Offices Will Never Be the Same After COVID-19: Here's What They Could Look Like	https://www.fastcompany.com/90488060/our-offices-will-never-be-the-same-after-covid-19-heres-what-they-could-look-like
Work Design Magazine	A Commonsense Guide for Returning to the Post COVID-19 Workplace	https://www.workdesign.com/2020/04/a-common-sense-guide-for-the-return-to-the-office/
The Facility Executive	The New Office Space: 4 Ways Coronavirus Will Change the Workplace	https://facilityexecutive.com/2020/04/the-new-office-space-4-ways-coronavirus-will-change-the-workplace/
Herman Miller	A Guide for Returning to the Physical Workplace	https://www.hermanmiller.com/research/categories/white-papers/strategies-returning-to-the-workplace-covid-19/
Steelcase	Designing the Post-COVID Workplace	https://www.steelcase.com/research/articles/designing-the-post-covid-workplace/
Knoll	Considerations for returning to a Health Workplace	https://www.knoll.com/design-plan/planning/considerations-for-returning-to-a-healthy-workplace
The Real Deal	New York building owners hashing out return-to-work plan	https://therealdeal.com/2020/04/27/new-york-building-owners-hashing-out-return-to-work-plan/

The Workforce		
Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)	CDC Activities and Initiatives Supporting the COVID-19 Response and the President's Plan for Opening America Up Again, May 2020.	https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/php/CDC-Activities-Initiatives-for-COVID-19-Response.pdf?referringSource=articleShare
Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)	Using Leading Indicators to Improve Safety and Health Outcomes	https://www.osha.gov/leadingindicators/docs/OSHA_Leading_Indicators.pdf
U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)	What You Should Know About COVID-19 and the ADA, the Rehabilitation Act, and Other EEO Laws	https://www.eeoc.gov/wysk/what-you-should-know-about-covid-19-and-ada-rehabilitation-act-and-other-eeo-laws
	Pandemic Preparedness in the Workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act	https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/pandemic-preparedness-workplace-and-americans-disabilities-act
U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)	USDA COVID-19 PLAYBOOK version 2.0 Supplement to Pandemic Plans, Occupant Emergency Plans & Continuity of Operations Plans	https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/COVID19%20Playbook.pdf

The Workforce		
World Economic Forum	How companies and employees can make their best coronavirus comeback	https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-covid-business-resilience-preparedness-skills/
Harvard Business Review	Your Employee Tested Positive for Covid-19. What Do You Do?	https://hbr.org/2020/03/your-employee-tested-positive-for-covid-19-what-do-you-do
Agency Personnel Officer Portal	Collection of guidance from DCAS and other oversights	https://citypoint.csc.nycnet/sites/APOPortal/SitePages/COVID-19.aspx

Appendices

The following documents are not available on the web as the other resources in this document. These are only available on Cityshare. You must be logged in to Cityshare to access these links.

1. Accessibility Considerations for a Return to Work Plan

2. Return to Office Flexible Schedule Options

3. PSB 600-3R Temporary Citywide Telework Policy

4. Guidelines for Telework Program

5. Alternative Work Arrangement Agreement

6. Guidelines for Managing Remotely

7. Guidelines and Checklist for Agencies Administering COVID-19 Symptoms Questions and Temperature Screening for City Employees

DCAS

nyc.gov/dcas

NYC Citywide Administrative Services