

Returning to the Workplace Amidst COVID-19



Plan Overview

As businesses prepare to return to the workplace, owners and tenants will require thoughtful guidance and enhanced best practices for creating healthy and safe workplaces during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With the understanding that businesses and jurisdictions around the globe will experience different response-recovery life cycles, and therefore need thoughtful and evolving recovery plans based upon the best and most up-to-date information from our health care professionals, local governments and industry organizations, this document contains guidelines from the Avison Young Real Estate Management Services team to assist owners and occupiers in navigating their strategy and adjustments for the “new normal.”

The seven key focus areas are:



Communications



Physical Distancing
Awareness



Cleaning
Services



Building
Operations



Security



Mechanical & Building
Systems



Signage

Since every asset and site condition is unique and there is no “one size fits all” solution, owners should carefully review each of the recommendations in this document for applicability to their facilities. The guidance contained in this document is intended to assist owners and their managers to tailor implementation within the unique needs of each building. During these times of constant change, owners and managers must stay abreast of the latest guidance provided by local governments, the The World Health Organisation (WHO), NHS UK, UK Government as well as industry organisations such as RICS and BOMA International. Owners should regularly check with their managers for updates.

Communication

A clear, timely and consistent communications programme is vital to a safe and effective return to the workplace strategy. Owners should engage with their managers to work through these guidelines and make decisions on which items would be appropriate for their individual building, centre, park or estate.

Once an agreement has been reached as to strategy, clear communications to tenants (and potentially additional stakeholders where relevant) should be disseminated. Additionally, as the plan evolves, updates should be issued so that owners, management teams, and their staff can implement the asset-specific plan, including:



**Physical
Distancing
Awareness**



**Cleaning
Services**



**Building
Operations**



Security



**Mechanical
& Building
Systems**



Signage

Sample Tenant Letter

**AVISON
YOUNG**

18 York Street
Suite 400, Mailbox #4
Toronto, ON L3T7V9
Canada
T 312.957.7615
F 555.555.5555
avisonyoung.com

May, 2020

Mr./s. First A. Lastname
Person's Title
123 Street Address
City, ST S5555
Country



Dear Mr. Tenant:

I hope you all have been well and safe as possible during this time.

As we prepare to reopen the building certain operational protocols have been put in place in order to maintain the safest and healthiest work environment as possible for our tenants, guests and service partners. Our objective is to instill confidence and self-assurance during these uncertain times.

Below is an outline of steps that Avison Young is implementing to ensure that you and your employees feel comfortable returning to work.

Property Manager to outline the exact steps agreed upon with the building owner here. Referenced below is an example of a typical tenant letters content.

Occupant Education/Physical Distancing Signage

- Signage/floor decals to be installed throughout the common areas to remind occupants and visitors to maintain safe distances in high traffic or confined areas such as lobbies, fitness centers, amenity areas and elevator cabs along with signage in restrooms instructing on proper hand washing.
- Staff and service providers will be equipped with PPE as appropriate when unable to maintain physical distancing guidelines or when moving throughout the building.
- We will run public service announcements and educational information on digital displays pertaining to prevention measures and education.
- We will post information on the building website and service portal.
- We are prepared to assist tenants as necessary to implement CDC's "Interim Recommendations for U.S. Community Facilities with Suspected/Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)".
- We will be providing open access to stairwells for those who want to avoid elevators.
- We will be designating exterior doors for ingress and egress.

Janitorial Efforts

- Janitorial scopes of work have been enhanced to focus on the cleaning and disinfection of high touch surfaces in public areas using products that meet the CDC's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Where not already present, as soon as supplies are available, we will place alcohol-based (70%) hand sanitizer stations throughout common areas.



Physical Distancing Awareness

Owners should coordinate with their property managers to engage in regular communication with tenants on the status of each phase and when phases change, as provided by the [UK Government](#) and [CDC](#). The below is a simplified phasing structure which we might expect to see.

Phase 1

- All vulnerable individuals or people showing any signs of illness should continue to work from home
- If possible, encourage tenants return to work in phases or at structured or alternative hours to avoid queuing and congestion in any communal spaces particularly
- Individuals should continue to maximize physical distance from others
- Common areas where personnel are likely to congregate and interact are closed

Phase 2

- All vulnerable individuals or people showing any signs of illness should continue to work from home
- Individuals should continue to maximize physical distance from others
- Common areas where personnel are likely to congregate and interact are closed
- People showing any signs of illness should refrain from entering the building

Phase 3

- Vulnerable individuals can resume public interactions, but should practice physical distancing
- Common area amenities can be reopened
- People showing any signs of illness should refrain from entering the building



Cleaning Services

Buildings will need to implement cleaning best practices for all tenants to safely return to the office. Tenant/occupier expectations for a healthy building will increase, and the property management team, along with their building owner, will need to amend the cleaning protocols to assure the tenants that their office environment is healthy and safe.

We have encouraged our Management team to work closely with our cleaning contractors to develop appropriate plans for individual buildings, ascertain the individual plans that tenants may be putting in place where relevant, and communicate plans and approach to tenants (and users where necessary).

Areas of importance for your cleaning contractor:



**Reception Area &
Common Areas**



**Disposal of Personal
Protection Equipment (PPE)**



**High Touch Point
Areas (HTPA)**



Amenity Areas



Lifts



**Path of
Travel**



**WCs and Shower
Facilities**

Cleaning Services

After a careful review and enhancement of the cleaning specifications, the following are enhanced measures that management should be taking:



Routine disinfecting of all high touch surfaces



Consider adding day cleaning schedule to provide a layer of comfort to the tenants and visitors if the cleaning is visible



Maintain adequate stock of cleaning supplies



Signage in restrooms instructing on proper hand washing and physical distancing (see signage)



Increased frequency of mopping WC & shower floors and keeping plumbing traps full



Partner with cleaning vendor for HTPA cleaning within common areas



Cleaning contractor is required to wear appropriate PPE equipment



Verify that your building has proper staffing to execute the mentioned protocols

Appropriate disinfectants should be utilised. All our products have been considered for suitability and have been **COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health)** assessed prior to their application and use by our service providers.

- Install “no touch” technology on entry doors, restroom doors and fixtures and proximity readers
- Install touchless hand sanitisers throughout all lift lobbies, fitness centres, outside WC doors, food prep areas
- Install WC waste receptacles close to the WC exit doors
- Surface contamination in common areas of the office such as kitchens will require more stringent cleaning procedures, consider shutting down food preparation areas such as pantries and coffee stations
- Keep inner vestibule doors open, to reduce possible contamination
- Apply electrostatic cleaning methods whenever applicable
- In conjunction with cleaning vendor, develop tenant-specific high touch point area (HTPA) cleaning program (upon request, billable to tenant)
- Consider extending urinal partitions



Building Operations

Tenant/occupiers and owners/ investors should conduct a full review of all building operations and activities that occur within their premises or asset. Safe and effective building operations in the “**new normal**” will require owners and managers to follow the guidance of health care professionals and local governments, while continuously assessing their impacts and fine-tuning building operations.

In order to ready building operations for a return to the workplace, recommended best practices and protocols include:



Implement physical distance queue management in main lobbies



Review risk assessments and use of PPE by supply chain



Require adequate supply of PPE for relevant building staff and consider making available to individuals



Consider developing a traffic system if appropriate to scale and arrangement of communal areas to ensure distancing



Deploy hand sanitiser dispensers in all entrance areas



Reduce or remove seating capacity in public spaces to promote physical distancing practices



Limit meeting and gatherings to a modest size and use virtual meeting technology such as Zoom or WebEx



Consider acrylic barrier shields & floor markers to maintain 6' distancing in reception



Building Operations



Regularly monitor the supply chain and communicate with supply vendors for lead-times and availability of PPE, hand sanitizers, cleaning supplies, and critical building supplies and maintain ample amount of each



Increase HVAC ventilation and adopt higher MERV rated air filters



Consolidate package and delivery locations to control traffic flow and better queuing procedure away from employee entrances



Reconfigure security desk check-in procedures to promote physical distance and consider glass screening between guests and security personnel



Reinforce physical distance, hand washing and cleaning guidance with building staff daily, either in very small groups or using virtual meeting technology



Consult with lift vendor to adjust lift operations and to determine appropriate maximum number of persons in lifts while maintaining physical distance



Re-evaluate vendor contract service levels and determine if adjustments such as cleaning enhancements, additional security staffing and increased indoor air quality testing frequency are necessary

Security

Partnering with your security service provider is critical to ensure that management is providing a welcoming and healthy workplace. In addition to providing security, security officers should act as ambassadors for the building and answer frequently asked questions. This mindset will help ease any anxiety that building occupants, visitors and staff may be feeling while returning to the workplace. For buildings that do not have onsite security, building owners may want to consider providing security officer services in the reception and lift banks for 30 days from the commencement of the re-entry plan. The following are guidelines that should be considered related to security:



Continuous tenant communication is key to ensure they are aware of any changes or updates to building operations



Regular communication with your security vendor is critical to ensure everyone is working together and delivering a consistent message. Always be in sync on expectations from day-to-day, week-to-week and month-to-month due to ever-evolving situation



Require your vendors provide adequate PPE for everyone on their staff



Security should answer questions empathetically and relay tenant concerns to building management



Security officers should defer matters beyond their knowledge to building management. Remember, we are all in this together and it's OK if they don't have the immediate answer



Building management should work with tenants to understand their return to workplace plans

Mechanical & Building Systems

Owners should consider the below general guidance and be sure to combine it with knowledge of the specific HVAC system type in a building, and the purpose and use of the facility. Like all hazards, risk can be reduced but not eliminated, owners should engage with their managers to be sure they understand the limitations of the HVAC system.



Provide 100% fresh air with no recirculation



Maximise and extend the operation of the mechanical ventilation



Switch fan coils off OR operate so that fans are continuously on (the latter is preferable to provide comfort conditions but will consume considerably more energy)



Where practical and safe, provide regular airing with windows



Heating, cooling and humidification set points to remain unchanged



Central outdoor air and extract air filters to be replaced in accordance with the planned maintenance schedule (consideration to be given to early replacement)



Regular filter replacement and maintenance works should be performed with appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) including correct respiratory protection



Building occupants should be asked to flush toilets with a closed lid



Signage

It is critical that owners work closely with their managers to ensure that each property has proper signage in place that reinforces a safe return to workplace strategy.

The below summary provides essential signage to reinforce CDC-recommended distancing and hygiene practices.



Building entrances

- Signage relevant to the phasing period the UK is in - i.e. in line with UK Government steps to return to work
- First area of communication and setting the tone for what to expect upon re-entry
- "Welcome to Building XYZ" – informational signage summarising any operational changes
- "Do Not Enter If" guidance signage, if applicable by local jurisdiction – stanchion or vinyl glass line



Reception

- "Please Wait Here" floor graphics – located at turnstiles and reception areas for queue to maintain proper 6' spacing
- "Keep Your Distance" located throughout the common areas



Lifts

- Installation of special awareness floor and wall graphics in lift lobbies and lift cabs which indicate the recommended 6' physical distancing locations and hand washing/sanitizing reminders
- "Car Occupancy – # Persons Maximum" – located outside lift near call buttons
- Signage highlighting call button protocol or cleaning regime - whichever is relevant

In the event of an emergency, please follow predetermined evacuation protocols.



Signage



Stairs

- As an alternative to lift traffic, designate up-only/down-only stairwells and install signage at each of the entries
- “Tired of Waiting? Take the Stairs” – located outside lifts towards the end of the queue



WCs and Showers

- Installation of special awareness floor and wall graphics at restroom entrances/exits and hand washing areas which indicate the recommended 6 feet physical distancing locations and hand washing/sanitizing reminders
- “Please Wash Your Hands” – 20 second recommendation located above every sink and back of restroom exit door
- “Please Stand Here” – floor graphic to maintain 6’ physical spacing at sinks



Amenities

- When re-opened, consider the installation of signage to maintain physical distancing and encourage good hand washing
- “Please Wash Your Hands” – 20 second recommendation located above every sink and back of restroom exit door
- “Please Wait Here” – floor graphic to maintain 6’ physical spacing (lounge spaces, communal areas etc)
- “Always Walk Clockwise” – located at entries and throughout amenity space
- “One Way Only (with arrow)” – located throughout common areas to direct proper flow of traffic

In the event of an emergency, please follow predetermined evacuation protocols.

- 1 SOCIAL DISTANCE
- 2 WASH HANDS
- 3 CLEAN SURFACES

Signage

Examples

The following signage program is meant to serve as a guide for ownership to consider in coordination with their managers, as all signs will not be applicable to every property or every situation.

Building Entrance

DO NOT ENTER
IF YOU ARE
SHOWING ANY
SYMPTOMS OF
COVID-19



Traffic Patterns

ONE WAY ONLY



ONE WAY ONLY



Lifts/Lift Lobbies/Turnstiles



LIFT OCCUPANCY
4 PERSONS MAX

PLEASE
WAIT HERE



Stairs

TIRED OF
THE WAIT?



TAKE THE STAIRS

UP ONLY
OPEN SLOWLY



Restrooms

KEEP YOUR
DISTANCE



PLEASE WASH
YOUR HANDS FOR
20 SECONDS



Sign Resources

[Shutterstock](#)
(purchase required)

[iStock](#)
(purchase required)

Sign Examples

[Health and
wellness posters](#)

Destination
Marketing team have
secured preferential
rates with signage
companies if required

"At Avison Young, everything we do is underpinned by thinking about people; how they interact with each other and with the places around them. Our homes, our workplaces, our shops and the myriad of other buildings that make up the fabric of our towns and cities are the places where we gather together. If COVID-19 fundamentally and permanently changes the way we want to interact with other people, the implications for our communities, buildings and cities could be truly monumental.

But before jumping to too many conclusions, we should recognize that our society and our world today are the product of some very powerful forces that will not easily be overturned."

Mark E. Rose, CEO

Nick Axford, Global Head of Research

COVID-19: Evaluating The "New Normal" in Commercial Real Estate

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