Returning to the Workplace
Amidst COVID-19
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 “Returning to the Workplace Amidst COVID-19” strategy and adjustments for the “new normal.”

The seven key focus areas are:

- Communications
- Physical Distancing Awareness
- Janitorial 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 U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), The World Health Organization (WHO), U.S. Government and Canadian government as well as industry organizations such as IREM and BOMA USA, BOMA Canada. Owners should regularly check with their managers for updates.
A clear and consistent communications program 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.

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

### Sample Tenant Letter

**May, 2020**

*AVISON YOUNG*

Mg, Doug A Landau

112 E River Address

City, NY 10015

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 to restore a sense of normalcy and health. In accordance with guidelines and best practices, we have assembled a list of strategies to guide our teams as we move forward.

**Property Manager to outline the exact steps agreed upon with the building owner here. Referenced below is an example of a typical letter to tenants.**

**Occupant Education/Physical Distancing Signage**

- Staff and security personnel will be equipped with PPE as appropriate when outside to maintain physical distancing guidelines or when entering the building.
- We will use public service announcements and educational information on digital displays pertaining to prevention, hygiene, and education.
- A COVID-19 specific webpage is included under the building website and tenant portal.
- We are prepared to send regular updates to all tenants for implementation.

**Janitorial Services**

- We are taking a proactive approach to cleaning common spaces, which includes the use of EPA registered disinfectants.
- We will be providing regular updates to tenants as we continue to monitor the situation.

**Mechanical & Building Systems**

- Air filtration systems have been enhanced to focus on the opening and distribution of high touch public areas. These areas are being monitored and cleaned regularly.
- The building heating and cooling systems have been upgraded to increase air flow.

**Physical Distancing Awareness**

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**Security**

- The building security team will be available to assist tenants and visitors.
- Access controls will be monitored and controlled to ensure the safety and security of all individuals.

**Signage**

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Once an agreement has been reached as to strategy, clear communications to tenants should be disseminated. Additionally, as the plan evolves, updates should be issued so that owners, management teams, and their staff can implement the building-specific plan, including:
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 [U.S. Government](https://www.cdc.gov) and [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• All vulnerable individuals or people showing any signs of illness should continue to work from home</td>
<td>• All vulnerable individuals or people showing any signs of illness should continue to work from home</td>
<td>• Vulnerable individuals can resume public interactions, but should practice physical distancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If possible, encourage tenants return to work in phases</td>
<td>• Individuals should continue to maximize physical distance from others</td>
<td>• Common area amenities can be reopened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Individuals should continue to maximize physical distance from others</td>
<td>• Common areas where personnel are likely to congregate and interact are closed</td>
<td>• People showing any signs of illness should refrain from entering the building</td>
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Buildings will need to implement janitorial 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 janitorial protocols to assure the tenants that their office environment is healthy and safe.

Management teams are encouraged to work closely with janitorial contractors to formulate plans that are appropriate for individual buildings and communicate their plans to tenants.

In order to protect the health and safety of tenants and visitors, it is advised by the CDC that COVID-19 developed cleaning protocols should remain in effect until a vaccine is developed using the Three Phase Program that the U.S. federal government has outlined on safely re-entering the work world.

Governments have recommended the following: U.S. Janitorial Guidelines; Health Canada Janitorial Guidelines

Areas of importance for your janitorial contractor:

- Lobby Area & Common Corridors
- Disposal of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)
- High Touch Point Areas (HTPA)
- Amenity Areas
- Elevators
- Path of Travel
- Restrooms
After a careful review and enhancement of the janitorial cleaning specifications, the following are enhanced measures that management should be taking:

- **Routine disinfecting of all high touch surfaces**
- **Increased frequency of mopping restroom floors and keeping plumbing traps full**
- **Consider adding day cleaning programs to provide a layer of comfort to the tenants and visitors if the cleaning is visible**
- **Partner with janitorial vendor for HTPA cleaning within common areas**
- **Maintain adequate stock of janitorial supplies**
- **Janitorial contractor is required to wear appropriate PPE equipment**
- **Signage in restrooms instructing on proper hand washing and physical distancing** (see signage)
- **Verify that your building has proper staffing to execute the mentioned protocols**

According to the CDC, implementing the necessary janitorial enhancements includes moving from a “green program” to using one with bleach-based disinfectants. **U.S. Registered Disinfectants, Health Canada Disinfectants.** Certain enhanced operational measures can be recommended to the building owner to help maintain a clean and disinfected workplace:

- Install “no touch” technology on entry doors, restroom doors and fixtures and proximity readers
- Install touchless hand sanitizers in all elevator lobbies, fitness centers, outside restroom doors, food prep areas
- Install restroom waste receptacles close to the restroom exit doors
- Surface contamination in common areas of the office such as kitchens will require more stringent janitorial 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 janitorial vendor, develop tenant-specific high touch point area (HTPA) cleaning program (upon request, billable to tenant)
- Consider extending urinal partitions
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Building Operations</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implement physical distance queue management in main lobbies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public-facing building employees including engineering, janitorial, security and vendor staff are required to wear face coverings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require adequate supply of PPE for building staff and consider making available to individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a traffic pattern to ensure physical distancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deploy hand sanitizer dispensers in all areas and near frequently used office equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce seating capacity in public spaces to promote physical distancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limit meeting and gatherings to a modest size and use virtual meeting technology such as Zoom or WebEx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acrylic barrier shields &amp; floor markers to maintain 6’ distancing in lobby</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<td><strong>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</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Increase HVAC ventilation and adopt higher MERV rated air filters</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consolidate package and delivery locations to control traffic flow and better queuing procedure away from employee entrances</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reconfigure security desk check-in procedures to promote physical distance and consider glass screening between guests and security personnel</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reinforce physical distance, hand washing and cleaning guidance with building staff daily, either in very small groups or using virtual meeting technology</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consult with elevator vendor to adjust elevator operations and to determine appropriate maximum number of persons in elevators while maintaining physical distance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>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</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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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 lobby and elevator 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.

### 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.

### Require your vendors provide adequate PPE for everyone on their staff

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

Created by icon4yu from the Noun Project
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.

**Standard Re-Opening Requirements:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Winter</th>
<th>Summer</th>
<th>PPE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not shut down building airflow overnight and on the weekends. Flush the building with fresh air.</td>
<td>Disable demand-controlled ventilation (DCV)</td>
<td>Servicing of equipment to be done with PPE (masks, gloves, goggles and disposable coveralls)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve central air filtration to MERV-13 or the highest compatible with the filter rack and AHU specifications. Seal edges of the filter to limit bypass.</td>
<td>Adjust building airflow to continually introduce fresh air to dilute recycled air and possible concentration of contaminants. Open minimum outdoor air dampers, as high as 100%, thus eliminating recirculation (in the mild weather season, this need not affect thermal comfort or humidity, but clearly becomes more difficult in extreme weather)</td>
<td>Reprogram BAS to allow for increased humidity levels as outside air will result in the need for a higher threshold (depending on climate)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Level 1 Enhancements

- Upgrade filter to MERV-13 or the highest rated filter. In most cases, AHUs will require upgrade to provide increased air flow.
- Increase filter changes from quarterly to bi-monthly or monthly.
- Add humidity sensors due to increased ventilation.

Level 2 Enhancements

- Addition of UV Filtration Systems
- CO² Demand level control
- Upgrade of fan systems to more efficient systems – Fan Array System

Level 3 Enhancements

- Building Automation Systems – Dehumidification – “dryer air is safer air”

Please note that many of these recommendations will increase operating costs at a time when building operators are likely seeking to reduce costs to adjust for lower revenues from business closings. Increasing energy costs by delivering 100% outdoor air on a 24/7 basis and incurring new equipment costs by installing UV-C lights, enhanced filtration and portable room air cleaners may not be feasible.
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building entrances</th>
<th>Lobby reception</th>
<th>Elevators</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Phase one, two, and three signage with basic information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• First area of communication and setting the tone for what to expect upon re-entry</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Welcome to Building XYZ” – informational signage summarizing operational changes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Do Not Enter If” guidance signage, if applicable by local jurisdiction – stanchion or vinyl glass line</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Please Wait Here” floor graphics – located at turnstiles and reception areas for queue to maintain proper 6’ spacing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Keep Your Distance” located throughout the common areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Installation of special awareness floor and wall graphics in elevator lobbies and elevator cabs which indicate the recommended 6’ physical distancing locations and hand washing/sanitizing reminders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Car Occupancy – # Persons Maximum” – located outside elevator near call buttons</td>
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In the event of an emergency, please follow predetermined evacuation protocols.
### Stairs
- As an alternative to elevator traffic, designate up-only/down-only stairwells and install signage at each of the entries.
- “Tired of Waiting? Take the Stairs” – located outside elevators towards the end of the queue.

### Restrooms
- 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 (cafeterias).
- “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.
- “Gym Etiquette” – located on gym entrance and throughout locker room.
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building Entrance</th>
<th>Traffic Patterns</th>
<th>Elevators/Elevator Lobbies/Turnstiles</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DO NOT ENTER</td>
<td>ONE WAY ONLY</td>
<td>PLEASE WAIT HERE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>leftrightarrow</td>
<td>CAR OCCUPANCY 4 PERSONS MAX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIRE OF THE WAIT?</td>
<td>UP ONLY OPEN SLOWLY</td>
<td>KEEP YOUR DISTANCE 6 ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAKE THE STAIRS</td>
<td></td>
<td>PLEASE WASH YOUR HANDS</td>
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Sign Resources

- Shutterstock (purchase required)
- iStock (purchase required)

Sign Examples

- Health and wellness posters
- PosterOne
“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