

As most states are entering a new phase of the pandemic, nonessential businesses are looking to reopen. **Reopening the workplace** requires new operational practices to mitigate COVID-19 related risks and to ensure the health and safety of employees and customers. This **small business reopening guide to COVID-19** will discuss key considerations to creating a safe work environment for all while providing an awareness of **reopening challenges** during this global pandemic.

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Creating a Safe Working Environment

Preparing a safe work environment is imperative to prevent the spread of infectious disease in the workplace. A detailed health and safety plan should be created and implemented to communicate procedures for a new working environment. Some important factors to consider are:

- indoor air quality and ventilation
- disinfection/sanitation procedures
- hygiene expectations
- communication of new health protocols with employees and clients
- training for managers and employees about safety protocols
- procedures for handling non-compliance with safety protocols

As conditions continue to evolve, it is best to assess and revise plans according to recommendations by [Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\)](#), the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), and [state health departments](#). Designating a specific point of contact within the company as a resource for compliance and changes is a good practice to ensure employees are aware of safety measures in place and how to comply with them.

Employee COVID-19 Health Monitoring

As employees return to work, many employees have concerns about potential exposure to COVID-19. To address these concerns and mitigate risks, policies may be created for employee health monitoring. Health monitoring actions may include:

- temperature checks upon entering the workplace
- screening questions to identify symptoms and potential exposure
- [travel policies](#)
- screening for COVID-19 may be recommended as an additional measure

Sanitation materials and personal protective equipment (PPE) such as face coverings and gloves can help prevent spread of infectious disease and help employees feel safer. It is important to identify the availability of [PPE](#) and sanitation materials for employees or if it's expected that they provide their own as that may influence their willingness to return to work.

Another essential consideration to **reopening procedures** is how to handle employee illness, including the possibility of a positive COVID-19 case. In March 2020, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) issued a revised [Pandemic Preparedness in the Workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act](#) guide that addresses actions an employer can and cannot take in compliance with the ADA in times of a health crisis identified as a direct threat. Additionally, the EEOC provides [guidance](#) on ADA and other EEO laws in the time of COVID-19. Be sure to always maintain the confidentiality of employee health information.

Establishing Small Business Reopening Guidelines

As most states implement a [phased approach](#) to economic recovery, there are recommendations for business operating procedures to safely reopen. In order to reduce face-to-face contact and promote social distancing, it is recommended that businesses able to operate remotely continue doing so and introduce a phasic return. Some benefits and tips for effective use of working from home may be found [here](#). Flexible work hours and staggering shifts are helpful for maneuvering returns to work without compromising the recommended 6 feet social distancing strategy. New regulations for establishment capacity may also be in place, varying by state and business type. The workplace may require rearranging to create physical space between employees' workspaces.

Interviews and Hiring

As recruiting events and conferences have been canceled during the viral pandemic, other strategies and tools such as [videoconferencing](#) may be utilized to successfully achieve recruitment and onboarding processes. On one hand, recruitment may be easier as most job seekers are at home and more available during the day. On the other hand, communication may be hindered if job seekers [do not have internet access](#) or technology needed to communicate with potential employers. Thus, it may be important to prioritize remote working skills when evaluating candidates. Moreover, attracting employees is different during a pandemic. As employees are often attracted to unique company benefits, employers may offer technology and other tools which make it easier to work from home.

Challenges to Reopening a Small Business

Common Areas

Areas where employees and clients may experience close contact (within 6 feet) may need to be temporarily closed off or require stricter disinfection and sanitation procedures. Water and coffee stations, restrooms, lobby areas, conference rooms, and cafeterias may be closed or rearranged to encourage social distancing to limit potential exposure.

Vendors and Visitors

As vendors may experience increased business activity with the economy reopening, lead times may change as well as their distribution channels. The business owner-vendor relationship may experience adjustments, and it may be necessary to find new suppliers if previous suppliers went out of business or are incapable of meeting evolving inventory needs. If business operations are expected to increase, inventory practices may need to be re-evaluated to reflect expected business activity. Additionally, it's important to establish protocols for drop-off, pickup, and delivery of items. Site logging for suppliers and employees may aid in keeping track of entry-exit activity to facilitate [contact tracing](#) in the event a COVID case is reported at your establishment. Establishing policies for entry, such as screening and appointment-only, is critical as well as procedures for denying entry. Expectations should be clearly communicated ahead of time to all visitors to avoid potential issues.

Communication with Clients and Customers

Establishing effective communication channels is of high importance currently. Some businesses may find that deepening their online presence is the best method of reaching customers. As social media activity has spiked, effective use of those channels may strengthen customer relationships. Connecting with the community to gather information about health anxieties can inform business decisions to address any customer concerns. Analyzing customer behavior and business analytics may enhance the **reopening experience** to identify what adjustments should be made as the economy transitions into post-pandemic recovery. As conditions evolve, communicating changes in a timely, transparent manner is key to the **reopening process**.

Additional Small Business Resources

Already in business or thinking about starting your own small business? Check out our

various small business resources:

- View small business help topics here: [Small Business Information Center](#)
- View business reports here: [Small Business Snapshots](#)
- View industry-specific research here: [Market Research Links](#)

Remember, you can also receive **free professional business advice** and free or low-cost business training from your [local Small Business Development Center!](#)

If you have a small business resource you think should be included here, please [Contact Us](#).

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