The COVID-19 pandemic spread quickly across the United States in February and March, forcing cities to impose stay-at-home and shelter-in-place orders. Building operations had to adjust as non-essential personnel worked from home. We are now preparing for a phased re-entry of office buildings over the coming months. To provide guidance on building operations and workforce issues, BOMA International assembled a task group from across North America to help owners and managers plan for what is coming. This document provides guidance for preparing commercial buildings for the safe return of office tenants, building personnel, visitors, vendors, contractors, and others, and identifies other operational and safety procedures and protocols that should be implemented, updated, or enhanced as we prepare to live and work in a post-COVID-19 world. This is a framework for developing your individual property or portfolio plans. Information presented represents suggested best practices and procedures and identifies questions and issues you should consider.

Plan and Prepare

Start Now. Develop a plan for building re-entry well before stay-at-home orders and other restrictions are lifted. Update your plan regularly as situations change and new information becomes available.

Assemble Your Team. Your planning team should include representatives from owners/asset management, property management, engineering, and key vendors and service providers. Consider involving tenant councils if you have them at any of your properties.

Communicate with Tenants, Vendors and Contractors. Share your re-entry plan with tenants, vendors, and contractors, and ask them to share their plans, questions, and concerns with you. Discuss potential changes to leases and contracts.

Assess New Risks. Meet with your owner's risk manager and insurance broker to update coverage and assess new liability risks as a result of COVID-19.

Consult with Legal Counsel. Review all planned new procedures and protocols, leases and contracts, staffing and operational changes, and other potential legal exposures. Be sure you understand guidance from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and other employment-related laws and orders.

Stay Informed! Stay abreast of federal, state, and local mandates and recommendations, as well as guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), and other regulatory and public health agencies.

Health and Safety for Building Personnel, Tenants & Visitors

Social Distancing and Personal Protective Equipment

- Follow CDC guidelines to maintain social distancing and follow federal, state and local mandates or recommendations for wearing face masks or coverings. Face masks/coverings may be helpful where social distancing is a challenge.
- Instruct building personnel, vendors, and contractors to wear face masks/coverings provided by their employers (OSHA requires janitorial staff to wear face masks). Amend existing service agreements, if necessary, to include these new requirements.

- Advise tenants to follow state and local guidelines and recommendations regarding social distancing and face masks/coverings. Clearly communicate any building requirements and recommendations that may be in place for tenants to wear face masks/coverings in common areas.
- Maintain proper hygiene by frequently washing hands (with hot water and soap for 20 seconds, as recommended). Hand sanitizers should be readily available in public spaces and common areas.
- Recommend tenants limit the number of guests/visitors as the building adjusts to re-entry.
- Work with tenants on possible staggered work hours and/or workdays to limit building occupancy initially and for some period of time after re-entry (some cities are mandating that occupancy be maintained at less than 50 percent initially).
- Follow state and local guidelines regarding limits on meetings and gatherings; CDC currently recommends meeting limitations of 10 people or less. Encourage virtual meetings whenever possible.
- Schedule virtual rather than in-person property tours whenever possible, or schedule tours before or after normal business hours.

Safe Use and Occupancy of Elevators

- Consider elevator cab sizes, number of building floors, and daily number of tenants and visitors when establishing social distancing guidelines for elevator riders. If an elevator cab is not large enough to accommodate 6-foot spacing between occupants, consider limiting riders to 4−one in each corner−for example.
- Place queuing marks in elevator lobbies to reinforce social distancing; consider using stanchions, floor decals, mats, etc. to control elevator traffic.
- Designate elevators for "up" and "down" use to avoid longer ride times. Consider programming elevators to return to the ground floor for faster loading.
- To ease elevator traffic and wait times, consider opening stairwells and designate "up" and "down" stairwells. Plan for more frequent and more thorough cleaning and disinfecting of stairwells and handrails in response to increased stair traffic.

Common Areas and Amenity Spaces

- Increase space between lobby furniture and/or reduce seating to promote and support social distancing.
- In cooperation with third-party contractors where applicable, consider closing amenity spaces, such as fitness areas, conference rooms, retail, and restaurants for at least 30 days following re-entry, as recommended by BOMA, or follow state and local guidelines and mandates.
- After fitness centers have re-opened, increase space between or restrict use of some equipment (e.g. every other stationary bike or treadmill) to maintain distance between guests, and implement social distancing protocols for fitness classes and personal training. Review existing waivers, revise as needed, and reissue for user's signature.
- Provide hand sanitizer stations in lobbies, elevator lobbies, mailrooms, parking facilities and other common areas, and near restrooms, fitness facilities, retail, and restaurants. Supply hand wipes in fitness facilities for guests before and after equipment use.
- Provide trash containers for face masks near entrances/exits, elevators, and other common areas; empty and disinfect containers at least daily and more often if warranted.
- Allow bike rooms to remain open and prepare for an increase in bike riders as commuters seek alternatives to mass transit. Identify additional bike parking areas to support increased volume.

Restrict Use of Shared Equipment, Supplies and Space

- Following CDC guidance, discourage workers from sharing office equipment, such as phones and computers. In the event equipment is shared, provide cleaning and disinfection between uses and advise staff on the use of masks, gloves, and other protection while using equipment.
- Instruct building engineers and contractors to maintain their own toolboxes and to clean or disinfect their tools and other materials between uses.
- Consider installing physical setups, such as sneeze and cough guards, to protect your staff, and partitioned workstations if possible.
- Ensure cleaning supplies and materials utilized by vendors are not shared among buildings and clients and that

tenants provide their own supplies and cleaning protocols for their spaces.

- Utilize or phase-in touch-free technology wherever possible. Equip restrooms with touch-free toilets, sinks, fixtures and dispensers; utilize touch-free hand sanitizing stations; and provide touch-free trash cans where possible.

Security and Building Access

- Limit access points to the building–one entrance and one exit if possible. Create visitor areas at lobby desk with separate paths for "in" and "out."
- If possible, position security personnel at entry points and clearly define their duties and roles. For example, if building policy requires tenants and visitors to wear face masks/coverings in lobbies and other common areas, security personnel may be asked to enforce these requirements.
- Implement social distancing protocols at security and lobby desks to protect personnel.
- Use clear, subscribed and consistent floor markings and signage.
- If possible, require tenants to meet and escort visitors or report them in advance to security personnel. Use a visitor management system through pre-registration and check-in to minimize interaction with the security team.
- Develop delivery protocols in cooperation with tenants to accommodate different delivery security preferences. For buildings not open to the public, encourage employees receiving packages to retrieve them from the lobby.

Signage

- Provide signage in parking facilities, building entrances and exits, lobbies, common areas, and tenant and occupant spaces outlining new rules and procedures. Display posters about social distancing, handwashing, steps to take if ill, etc.
- Provide signs near elevators explaining any new procedures for queuing, occupancy limitations in elevator cabs, etc. Don't forget signage near freight elevators with requirements for face masks/coverings and other personal protective equipment for contractors and building personnel.
- Signage near fitness centers and restaurants should include information on new or limited operating hours, guidance for social distancing, and information about regular cleaning and disinfecting routines.

Healthy and Safe Building Operations, Systems, and Management Practices

Building Personnel and Contractors

Building Personnel
- Follow CDC guidelines and provide your staff with the equipment and training necessary to perform their jobs safely, including the use of personal protective equipment (PPEs).
- Conduct employee awareness training to help prevent initial or further exposure to the virus and keep detailed records of when trainings were provided. Training should include how to interact with tenants and visitors in this new environment, such as when to get on an elevator, engaging tenants in their space, social distancing, face mask/covering usage, proper hygiene, etc.
- Absenteeism may have an impact on staffing. Discuss with your staff the policies regarding flex hours and leave as employees may feel uncomfortable returning to work and risk becoming ill. Best practices include cross training all staff to fill in when other staff members are out sick or caring for another individual who is sick.
- If a staff member tests positive for COVID-19, practice non-discriminatory and CDC-based criteria to determine when it is safe for the staff member to return to work.
- Consider additional staffing that may be necessary for traffic direction in lobbies and elevator lobbies and manage any new visitor or delivery procedures.
- Consider CDC and OSHA recommendations for offering flex hours and staggering staff shifts. As you adjust work schedules, make sure to modify or eliminate any overlapping shifts.
- Reduce face-to-face interactions between building staff, tenants, and vendors. Are there any services you can provide remotely to reduce face-to-face interactions? Consider performing certain maintenance and other services before or after normal business hours when the building is relatively empty.

Vendors and Contractors

- Ask your vendors to share their health and safety plans and new protocols with you in advance of opening, and proactively work with your vendors to have a plan in place before stay-at-home orders are lifted.
- Establish procedures to protect the safety of your vendors and contractors, such as check in/check out, use of PPEs and other protective gear, limiting access to assigned work areas, and managing no-touch key drop-off.
- Amend building rules and regulations for construction contractors to incorporate specific COVID-19 requirements, including questionnaires, use of appropriate PPE, etc.
- Do not permit vendors to send staff to your property who may be showing signs of illness or have been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19.
- Identify back-up vendors where possible in case of personnel shortages or supply chain interruptions.
- Re-negotiate or re-bid service contracts to include new requirements for staffing or services; be sure to consider union requirements and restrictions.

Janitorial

- Prior to building re-entry, consult with your janitorial contractor about the level of cleaning that may be needed in your building and review site inventory to ensure adequate cleaning supplies and products. If the building has been empty, normal cleaning and sanitizing may be all that is needed. If the building has been occupied or partially occupied, more thorough cleaning and disinfection may be desirable.
- Depending on building class and occupancy, consider using hand-held UVC wands for quick, high-volume disinfecting; flash restrooms with UVC disinfection when empty.
- Increase frequency of cleaning and disinfection in high density and high-touch areas, such as building and elevator lobbies; elevator interiors, buttons and surfaces; restrooms; furniture; fixtures; door knobs; switch plates; shared conference spaces; building and suite entrances; mats; handrails; turnstiles; counters; trash containers; and other frequently touched surfaces.
- Fitness facilities, cafes, restaurants, and retail located in the building may require more frequent and deeper cleaning and disinfecting.
- Suspend use of cloth wipes or other reusable cleaning materials and follow EPA and CDC recommendations for disposing cleaning supplies.
- If a building employee, tenant, or visitor becomes ill or tests positive for COVID-19, schedule deep cleaning and disinfection in the affected and all building common areas. Follow a defined COVID-19 cleaning program provided by a qualified service provider.
- Cleaning staff may benefit from new and refresher training on cleaning protocols and proper use of disinfectants.
- Follow EPA, CDC and other government-approved guidelines, recommendations, and directions for cleaning products, procedures, dwell times, and protocols; confirm with your service provider or consult a third party if practical.

Mechanical Systems (HVAC, Plumbing, Water, Elevator)

HVAC

- During low- or no-occupancy and prior to building re-entry, run HVAC equipment in building and tenant spaces on at least a reduced−if not regular−schedule.
- Continue normal and regular HVAC maintenance, including filter changes. Check with your building engineers and HVAC contractor for any other recommended maintenance, changes in maintenance schedules, or filter or system upgrades or changes.
- If possible, consider increasing exhaust and infusion of outside air for re-entry and perhaps for several weeks following re-entry.
- Consult ASHRAE guidelines for operating heating, ventilating, and air conditioning systems to reduce COVID-19 transmission and follow CDC guidance where applicable.

Water

- During low- or no-occupancy and prior to building re-entry, operate water systems, toilets, faucets, etc. on a regular basis to avoid the accumulation of biofilm and other bacteria which can accumulate in as little as 3-5 days.

- Consider flushing and cleaning systems before opening. Refer to ICC's 2018 International Plumbing Code for flushing and disinfecting guidelines and/or consult with a third party if necessary and practical.
- Check P-traps to confirm water seals have not dried out due to lack of water flow.
- Continue to monitor and service all water systems, including hot water heaters, ice machines, filtration systems, etc.

Elevator and Other
- Continue normal and regular elevator maintenance and implement new cleaning protocols as described above under "Janitorial."
- Conduct an overall maintenance and systems check with your engineer before re-opening.

Emergency Preparedness, Evacuation, and Response

- Have a plan in place should there be a resurgence of the virus later in the year. Medical experts expect the COVID-19 situation to continue to evolve throughout the year, and you may need to adjust your emergency preparedness plan to incorporate the appropriate pandemic response.
- Utilize your existing emergency preparedness team (or separate pandemic team, if warranted) to communicate with tenants and document how the building will respond to pandemic emergencies. Be aware that tenant expectations are likely to change and increase. Also monitor federal, state and local changes or mandates and adjust your pandemic plan where necessary.
- Work with your local fire department to determine best practices for holding fire drills while social distancing measures are in place. Social distancing may not be practical when moving people rapidly to safety, and new relocation protocols and after-drill cleaning may be needed.
- Monitor federal, state, and local changes or mandates and adjust your pandemic plan where necessary. Regularly check with CDC and World Health Organization (WHO) for the most up to date COVID-19 guidelines.

Communication with Tenants

- Provide frequent and timely communications with your tenants and ensure their senior leadership's buy-in to reduce confusion, help prevent further spread of the infection, and provide a safe building environment.
- Be prepared for re-entry well before an official date is set. Ensure you are constantly communicating with tenants about building updates and changes and tenants are communicating with you about their plans prior to re-entry.
- Hold a virtual pre-opening meeting with tenants. Convey any new policies or procedures the building will be implementing, how you will communicate with tenants about any changes in building procedures, and proper protocol for reporting a positive COVID-19 case. Communicate any new policies for entry/exit, common areas, elevator usage, amenity spaces, parking, and deliveries. Ask tenants to share their re-entry plans so that building staff may help make the process as smooth and safe as possible.
- Clearly communicate tenants' responsibilities and obligations within their suites/workspaces for decisions about social distancing, use of PPEs, work hours, illness monitoring/temperature taking, and other health and safety procedures in the workplace. Employers are responsible for their employees.
- Communicate what notification and cleaning procedures and steps will be taken if a positive COVID-19 case is detected. Talk with tenants about their financial responsibility for cleaning and disinfecting procedures in their space that may be outside normal or typical cleaning requirements.
- Ask tenants about any challenges they may be facing. Do their employees have any concerns? What are their priorities as they return to work? How can property management continue to be an effective partner?
- Refer to BOMA International's COVID-19 Tenant FAQ for sample responses to tough tenant questions.

Risk Management and Insurance

- Meet with your owner's risk manager and insurance broker to review policies and coverage and assess new liability risks as a result of COVID-19. Review all preventative steps you have taken and plan to take to keep your staff, tenants, and buildings safe.
- Verify all procedures for making and filing claims, including required forms, deadlines, and backup materials.

- Keep an accurate record of any potential income losses that may be covered and any expenses related to mitigating potential claims for an insured loss.
- Identify the appropriate contact in the insurance broker's or carrier's office who handles any claims against the building made by contractors or tenants on losses resulting from force majeure or business interruption.
- Talk to your risk manager and insurance broker about liability exposure in the event a tenant does not follow safety protocols; understand tenant vs. landlord responsibilities.

Legal Considerations: Liability, Responsibilities, Contracts, Leases and Staff

- If the building manager or property owner becomes aware an individual who tested positive for COVID-19 was at the premises (whether its own employees, tenants, or visitors), there may be a duty to warn other tenants and employees and/or prevent access to certain areas in the building. However, be sure to protect the identity of the infected person and his/her employer; we suggest you announce only the floor or area of the building where that person worked or visited.
- Identify all contracts for construction or other services that were in effect or in final negotiations prior to stay-at-home mandates. Determine which contracts should be amended, canceled or delayed and discuss force majeure and other legal exposures and remedies with legal counsel.
- Review and consider revising leases to include new and additional tenant insurance requirements, protection of landlord from rent abatement and loss-of-use claims, and hold harmless protection.
- Owners, managers, and legal counsel should work together to develop criteria for responding to tenant requests for rent or lease term adjustments. The same team should advise regarding the owner's obligations to its lenders and their requirements for late payments or adjustments.
- Ensure you understand and follow employment-related laws and regulations before implementing new staffing-related rules, procedures, work requirements, hours/shifts, and other new requirements and protocols. These include: OSHA; EEOC; NLRA; state and local orders about essential businesses; return-to-work; mask/face coverings/PPE; ADA and state and local anti-discrimination laws; state and local sick leave and COVID-specific leave and protection laws; obligations under CARES Act/PPE; national origin discrimination laws; and federal and state laws regarding potential harassment or discrimination of employees with Asian ancestry.

Resources

- **American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers**
  www.ashrae.org/technical-resources/resources

- **BOMA International**
  www.boma.org/coronavirus

- **Centers for Disease Control**
  www.cdc.gov/coronavirus

- **Coronavirus (COVID-19) Resource Center**
  www.coronavirus.gov

- **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission**
  www.eeoc.gov

- **Federal Emergency Management Agency**
  www.fema.gov/coronavirus

- **International Codes Council**
  www.iccsafe.org

- **Occupational Safety & Health Administration**
  www.osha.gov/coronavirus

- **White House**
  www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica

- **World Health Organization**
  www.who.int/coronavirus

For more information about BOMA International's emergency preparedness resources, please visit:
www.boma.org