How to safely reopen business during COVID-19.



Whether you've had to temporarily close your business because of the COVID-19 pandemic or a natural disaster, like a hurricane or tornado, we know how important it is to get back to business. And, we want to help you get there safely. To help you navigate reopening your workplace after a temporary closure, we have compiled guidelines from safety experts to help business owners reduce potential exposures and protect employees, customers and vendors, as well as property, machinery and equipment.

Discover how to safely reopen your business.

Employees

As new COVID-19 cases begin to slow in the U.S., businesses are preparing to open their doors. Limiting exposure to COVID-19 is key to keeping employees safe while in the workplace. To do this, businesses should consider the following:

- Develop policies that encourage sick employees to stay at home without fear of reprisals, and ensure employees are aware of these policies. Develop other flexible policies for scheduling and telework (if possible), and create leave policies to allow employees to stay at home to care for sick family members or care for children if schools or childcare are closed.
- Promote etiquette for coughing and sneezing and handwashing. Provide tissues, no-touch trash cans, soap and water, and hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Plan to implement practices to minimize face-to-face contact between employees if social distancing is recommended by your state or local health department. Consider flexible work arrangements, like

staggered shifts or telework.
- Perform routine environmental cleaning. Routinely clean and disinfect all frequently touched surfaces, such as workstations, countertops, handrails and doorknobs. Discourage sharing of tools and equipment, if possible.
- Provide education and training materials in an easy to understand format and in the appropriate language and literacy level for all employees, like fact sheets and posters.
- If one of your employees becomes sick while at work, they should be separated from other employees, customers and visitors and sent home immediately. Follow CDC guidelines for cleaning and disinfecting areas the employee visited.

If you'd like to learn more about protecting your employees' health and safety in the workplace during COVID-19, the following resources from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are available:

- Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19
- COVID-19 – Businesses & Workplaces

Customers, Vendors and Visitors

For businesses who welcome customers, vendors or visitors into the building, additional precautions should be taken to minimize exposure to respiratory illnesses, like COVID-19. Whenever possible, limit the number of visitors, subcontractors, vendors, etc. coming to your site. If it's necessary for any non-employee to visit your business in person, be sure to inform the person of any new requirements ahead of time. Communicate clear expectations about the protocols in place, including social distancing, use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and measures taken to decrease virus transmission from potentially contaminated surfaces.

For businesses who serve the public, precautions need to be taken to minimize exposure to customers and visitors as well as employees. This includes effective **Communication**, **Controls**, and **Cleaning and Disinfecting** processes.

Communication

When people enter your business, clearly communicate recommended or required behaviors so everyone understands what is expected. Setting up a screening process at entrances also can aid in minimizing exposures.

Controls

Where possible, consider installing physical barriers between employees and customers to help minimize exposures. Incorporate social distancing by creating six-foot spaces between employees and customers. If social distancing is not possible, have employees wear appropriate PPE that covers their nose and mouth.

Consider reconfiguring the layout of your business to reduce or eliminate areas where groups can gather. Eliminating gathering areas can help to minimize exposures to employees, vendors and visitors.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

Initiate processes and protocols for regular cleaning and disinfecting at your business. Routine cleaning and disinfection of surfaces can help slow the spread of COVID-19. Cleaning and disinfection should happen at least once per shift or more depending on the type of business. Focus on high-touch surfaces and objects. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets and sinks. In retail and food establishments, pay special attention to cash registers, tables, chairs and countertops.

The CDC also offers a Cleaning and Disinfecting guide for businesses.

Property, Machinery and Equipment

Prior to reopening a business or building after an extended closure, if building systems were sitting idle, consider services these may need. Building water systems and devices should be inspected, cleaned or repaired. Stagnant water can create ideal conditions for certain bacterial growth, including Legionella, which can cause pneumonia.

Heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems also should be inspected. Run these systems for hours prior to scheduling your reopen date to ensure they are operating properly. If your HVAC system needs repair, it should be serviced before reopening for business. Another tip for improving ventilation and air quality in your building is to use a filter with the highest-compatible rating or portable room air cleaner with a HEPA filter.

For businesses that use large machinery or equipment, a cold start of machinery and equipment following an extended period of inactivity could lead to catastrophic failure of mechanical parts. A pre-start inspection of all critical parts and components will minimize unexpected breakdowns. Here’s what businesses should be mindful of before starting machinery:

- Ensure all critical spare parts and tools are present.
- Examine the machine for leaks and check that lubrication levels are sufficient.
- Check plugged-in electrical parts are securely connected and there is no loose or damaged wiring. With the power isolated, check control panel switches and buttons are working properly.
- Where possible, move rotating, pivoting and sliding parts manually and lubricate where needed according to the machine’s maintenance manual.
- Replace all guarding after the necessary checks have been completed and safely start the machine slowly in steps. If possible, verify each part is operating correctly before engaging the next step.

For additional information, Hartford Steam Boiler offers a free guide for equipment start-up following an extended shutdown period.

At Patriot Insurance, our safety experts are here to help and offer guidance to business owners every step of the way. To learn more our safety services and loss control solutions, talk with one of our local, independent agents today.

This article was originally posted on the Frankenmuth Insurance website. Patriot Insurance is a subsidiary of Frankenmuth Insurance.