

Social distancing in the workplace

Social distancing, also known as physical distancing, is one of the most effective ways to keep yourself and others safe from being exposed to the coronavirus, and therefore reducing the spread. This virus is spread when droplets of an infected person are released into the air by talking, sneezing, or coughing and come in contact with another person's mouth or nose. Practicing proper hygiene when sneezing or coughing and creating physical distance makes it less likely for droplets to travel person to person.

To practice social distancing, maintain a physical distance of 6 feet from other people. The workplace is where we once congregated for meetings, met face to face with customers and clients, and gathered socially during break time. Here are some tips to prepare the physical workplace, your employees, and customers/clients for a safe return to your organization.

Tips for adjusting the physical workplace

- Determine how many employees can safely be in conference rooms, break rooms, cafeteria, or the copy room at once while practicing social distancing
- Space out desks or remove chairs from tables to create a distance of 6 feet
- Use floor markings, signs and tape to designate 6 feet spacing for standing to work, setting up chairs, etc.
- Encourage usage of stairs over the elevator, and when the elevator is being used limit to two people in at a time.
- Open windows to improve circulation of fresh air
- Discourage sharing of equipment and tools, such as phones, desks, and other items
- Discourage sharing of dishes and utensils and encourage disposable items or items that brought and returned to home

Tips to keep employees engaged and safe

- Establish alternative to handshakes (wave, place hand over heart, peace sign)
- Encourage telephone, online and video conferencing, email, and IM for means of communication in place of in person meetings
- If unavoidable, keep in person meetings brief and where attendees can remain 6 feet apart
- Offer virtual trainings and workshops
- Eat at your desk and video conference with coworkers to stay safe and social during break time
- Designated lunch times for small groups of employees to utilize break room/cafeteria
- Avoid congregating in common areas, for example, by designating a point person per department to copy/print/retrieve

- Stagger work shifts or schedule designated work from home days to reduce the number of employees present at once
- Promote working from home if feasible

How to keep customers/clients safe:

- Depending on the nature of the business, use appointment only or limit the number of customers/clients allowed in at one time
- Gather/confirm information over the phone or email prior to meeting time to limit exposure of outside individuals with multiple employees within the organization
- Signage to clearly communicate instruction to those entering the building regarding social distancing, hand hygiene, masking
- Ensure clear path marking signage so workers and customers know where to exit, wait in line, and where to go
- Create physical barriers when it's unavoidable to stay within 6 feet of customers/clients
- Use floor markings signs and tape to designate 6 feet spacing for standing, chairs, etc.

By putting these practices into place, not only will employees, customers, and clients be kept safe but there will be peace of mind in knowing that they can return home without putting their families at risk.