

Returning to the Workplace

Amidst COVID-19



Plan Overview

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.

©2020 Policies and procedures surrounding efforts to combat, control and maintain a healthy workplace are rapidly changing. While information in this presentation is current as of the date written, the views expressed herein are subject to change and may not reflect the latest opinion of Avison Young. The guidelines herein have been developed from leading health agencies and government sources for information on the COVID-19 outbreak and are subject to change or deviation based on local regulations. Avison Young maintains regularly updated information on the COVID-19 outbreak and real estate from its website [COVID-19 Resource Center](#). The content provided herein is not intended as legal advice and should not be relied on as such.

Communication

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:



**Physical
Distancing
Awareness**



**Janitorial
Services**



**Building
Operations**



Security



**Mechanical
& Building
Systems**



Signage

Sample Tenant Letter

AVISON YOUNG

18 York Street
Suite 400, Toronto, ON M5E 1B4
Canada
T: 416.597.2600
F: 416.597.2020
avisonyoung.com

May 2020

Mrs. Jan A. Lestrade
Person's Title
123 Street Address
City, ST 10000
Country

Dear Ms. Tenant:

I hope you 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 in order to maintain the safety and health of our tenants, guests and service partners. Our objective is to instill confidence and self-assurance during these uncertain times.

Below is an outline of steps that Avison Young is implementing to ensure that you and your employees feel comfortable returning to work.

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

Occupant Education/Physical Distancing Signage

- Signage/floor decals to be installed throughout the common areas to remind occupants and visitors to maintain safe distances in high traffic or confined areas such as lobbies, fitness centers, amenity areas and elevator shafts along with signage in elevators indicating no single hand holding.
- Staff and service providers will be equipped with PPE as appropriate when unable to maintain physical distancing guidelines or when moving throughout the building.
- We will run public service announcements and educational information on digital displays pertaining to prevention measures and education.
- We will post information on the building website and service portal.
- We are prepared to assist tenants as necessary to implement CDC's "Guidance for Return to Work in Buildings with Substantial Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)"
- We will be providing open access to stairwells for those who want to avoid elevators.
- We will be designating exterior doors for ingress and egress.

Janitorial Efforts

- Janitorial scope of work has been enhanced to focus on the cleaning and disinfection of high-touch surfaces in public areas using products that meet the CDC's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Where not already present, as soon as supplies are available, we will place alcohol-based (70%) hand sanitizer stations throughout common areas.



Physical Distancing Awareness

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](#) and [CDC](#).

Phase 1

- All vulnerable individuals or people showing any signs of illness should continue to work from home
- If possible, encourage tenants return to work in phases
- Individuals should continue to maximize physical distance from others
- Common areas where personnel are likely to congregate and interact are closed

Phase 2

- All vulnerable individuals or people showing any signs of illness should continue to work from home
- Individuals should continue to maximize physical distance from others
- Common areas where personnel are likely to congregate and interact are closed

Phase 3

- Vulnerable individuals can resume public interactions, but should practice physical distancing
- Common area amenities can be reopened
- People showing any signs of illness should refrain from entering the building



Janitorial Services

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

Janitorial Services

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



Building Operations

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:



Implement physical distance queue management in main lobbies



Public-facing building employees including engineering, janitorial, security and vendor staff are required to wear face coverings



Require adequate supply of PPE for building staff and consider making available to individuals



Develop a traffic pattern to ensure physical distancing



Deploy hand sanitizer dispensers in all areas and near frequently used office equipment



Reduce seating capacity in public spaces to promote physical distancing



Limit meeting and gatherings to a modest size and use virtual meeting technology such as Zoom or WebEx



Acrylic barrier shields & floor markers to maintain 6’ distancing in lobby



Building Operations



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



Increase HVAC ventilation and adopt higher MERV rated air filters



Consolidate package and delivery locations to control traffic flow and better queuing procedure away from employee entrances



Reconfigure security desk check-in procedures to promote physical distance and consider glass screening between guests and security personnel



Reinforce physical distance, hand washing and cleaning guidance with building staff daily, either in very small groups or using virtual meeting technology



Consult with elevator vendor to adjust elevator operations and to determine appropriate maximum number of persons in elevators while maintaining physical distance



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



Security

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



Require your vendors provide adequate PPE for everyone on their staff



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



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

Mechanical & Building Systems

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:



Do not shut down building airflow overnight and on the weekends. Flush the building with fresh air



Disable demand-controlled ventilation (DCV)



Servicing of equipment to be done with PPE (masks, gloves, goggles and disposable coveralls)



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



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)



Reprogram BAS to allow for increased humidity levels as outside air will result in the need for a higher threshold (depending on climate)



Mechanical & Building Systems

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 – “drier 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.



Signage

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.



Building entrances

- Phase one, two, and three signage with basic information
- First area of communication and setting the tone for what to expect upon re-entry
- “Welcome to Building XYZ” – informational signage summarizing operational changes
- “Do Not Enter If” guidance signage, if applicable by local jurisdiction – stanchion or vinyl glass line



Lobby reception

- “Please Wait Here” floor graphics – located at turnstiles and reception areas for queue to maintain proper 6’ spacing
- “Keep Your Distance” located throughout the common areas



Elevators

- 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
- “Car Occupancy – # Persons Maximum” – located outside elevator near call buttons

In the event of an emergency, please follow predetermined evacuation protocols.

A wide-angle photograph of a modern gym interior. The floor is made of light-colored wood. Various exercise machines, including treadmills and weight machines, are arranged throughout the space. Large windows in the background let in natural light, showing some greenery outside. A dark blue rectangular box with the word "Signage" in white is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Signage



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

In the event of an emergency, please follow predetermined evacuation protocols.

1 SOCIAL
DISTANCE
2 WASH HANDS
3 CLEAN
SURFACES

Signage

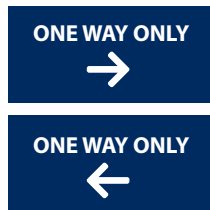
Examples

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.

Building Entrance



Traffic Patterns



Elevators/Elevator Lobbies/Turnstiles



Stairs



Restrooms



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