

Considerations for Reopening the Courthouse

A Pandemic Resource from NCSC

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Courthouse Reopening Considerations

As courthouses across the nation begin to reopen, various building industry organizations have issued guidelines related to COVID-19 preparedness. The information provided below is a summary of those guidelines. Not all of these considerations will apply to every building, and a tailored approach for their implementation is recommended to meet individual building and operational needs. Please refer to the list of references at the end of this document for additional information. The NCSC's Facility Planning Team is also available to answer questions.

Improving wayfinding and circulation

Reduce the number of people circulating through the facility by ensuring that they know the direct route to their destination.

- Provide in-person information and directions just after security screening
- Install clear signage throughout the building including a building directory, map, and directional signage
- Mark circulation routes and directions by adding decals to the floor
- Implement a one-way circulation route, including a separate building entry and exit (do not compromise building security protocols)

Providing additional entry screening

Additional screening measures such as temperature checks using touchless thermometers and short questionnaires are being used in many buildings. Inquiries typically include whether a person has had symptoms related to COVID-19, whether they have had contact with anyone diagnosed with the virus, etc. A protocol should be in place to help visitors who are denied entry due to health concerns, including instructions and contact information to reschedule their visit or access data remotely, if possible.

- Temperature checks administered by a trained person
- Questionnaires

Enforcing and facilitating social distancing

Proper social distancing should be enforced inside and outside of the courthouse. In some buildings, it may require actively monitoring the environment to remind occupants to space themselves adequately. Special consideration will need to be given to vertical transportation. Reduced elevator capacity will lead to queuing and extended wait times, potentially leading to a traffic jam and congested waiting areas.

- Provide an outdoor queuing area for those waiting to enter the building (Ideally, out of the wind and covered)
- Reduce the number of people entering the courthouse
- Respace and remove seating if needed
- Discourage congregating inside and outside of the building
- De-densify staff work areas by staggering workstations
- Organize the vertical transportation process to avoid bottlenecks
- Encourage the use of stairs to circulate between floors wherever possible to relieve demand on the elevators
- Implement one-way circulation routes inside the building
- Alternate restroom stalls to create distance (be sure to confirm compliance to local building codes)

Ensuring cleanliness

Routine cleaning is essential in reducing the potential spread of COVID-19.

- Routinely clean and disinfect indoor and outdoor areas
- Require and provide personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Provide easily accessible hand sanitizer in multiple locations
- Increase the use of anti-microbial surfaces in high-touch areas
- Sanitize and wipe down high-touch surfaces regularly
- Utilize UV sterilization (effectiveness against COVID-19 is unknown)
- Leave doors open wherever possible to reduce touch
- Install hands-free foot pedals to open doors where possible
- Replace manual door locks with touchless options where possible
- Install cleanable, transparent films over high-touch surfaces such as elevator buttons

Rethinking how existing space can be used differently or modified

Achieving proper social distancing can be a challenge in existing spaces. In some cases, modifications to spaces, furnishings, or establishing new practices may be needed.

- Install sneeze guards
- Spread out and consider using rooms for alternative purposes to gain space
- Install temporary partitions to sub-divide large spaces
- Leave doors to rooms hosting groups of people open to facilitate air circulation

Building systems

Building systems often go unnoticed, but in the case of COVID-19, heating, ventilation, cooling plays a significant role in reducing the risk of spreading the virus. Proper air filtration is crucial to a healthy indoor environment. The risk of stagnant water in unused plumbing lines can pose health risks, so precautions should be taken to flush those systems before reopening the building.

- Change HVAC air filters and clean air ducts before re-occupancy
- Run HVAC systems for longer hours and increase ventilation air changes
- Prioritize fresh air intake versus recycled air where possible
- Monitor and maintain recommended relative humidity levels
- Disable demand-controlled ventilation
- Consider the use of portable room air cleaner with HEPA filters
- For buildings experiencing extended closure, flush and test potable water systems

References and Additional Information

The following sources offer information on various topics related to buildings and COVID-19. The pandemic is an unfolding situation; monitoring the latest data is critical to the safety of building occupants.

Various sources were referenced in the creation of this document, including the American Institute of Architect's "Re-Occupancy Assessment Tool V1.0" A download link is provided below.

Buildings and Workspaces

American Institute of Architects (AIA)

"Re-Occupancy Assessment Tool V1.0"

<https://www.aia.org/resources/6292441-re-occupancy-assessment-tool:56>

American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA)

"Recovering from COVID-19 Building Closures"

https://aiha-assets.sfo2.digitaloceanspaces.com/AIHA/resources/Public-Resources/RecoveringFromCOVID-19BuildingClosures_GuidanceDocument.FINAL.pdf

American Society for Microbiology | MSystems

"2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic: Built Environment Considerations To Reduce Transmission"

<https://msystems.asm.org/content/msys/5/2/e00245-20.full.pdf>

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

"Exercise Starter Kit for Workshop on Reconstituting Operations"

<https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/188077>

Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA)

"Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19"

<https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>

Cleanliness and Safety

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

“Disinfecting Your Facility”

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) &

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

“Hierarchy of Controls”

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/hierarchy/default.html>

Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning

American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE)

“Guidance for Building Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic”

<https://www.ashrae.org/news/ashraejournal/guidance-for-building-operations-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

Plumbing

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

“Legionella (Legionnaires’ Disease and Pontiac Fever), Prevention with Water Management Programs”

<https://www.cdc.gov/legionella/wmp/index.html>

Wayfinding

Gensler

“Tips for Signage and Wayfinding in a Post-COVID-19 World”

<https://www.gensler.com/research-insight/blog/tips-for-signage-and-wayfinding-in-a-post-covid-19-world>

General Information

The National Center for State Courts

“Preparing for a Pandemic”

<https://cdm16501.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/facilities/id/194>

World Health Organization (WHO)

“A checklist for pandemic influenza risk and impact management” 2018 Update

https://www.who.int/influenza/preparedness/pandemic/PIRM_Checklist_update2018.pdf

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

“New Recipients of Disaster Grants Guide 2019”

<https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/179496>

Jurisdictions may consider tracking and documenting expenditures related to COVID-19 in case they are eligible for FEMA reimbursement.

