

# REOPENING BUILDING SYSTEMS SAFELY DURING COVID-19

As office buildings reopen, the returning workforce desires peace of mind above all. Prudent employers should rely on engineering controls, physical distancing and continued cleaning practices as they manage workforce reintroduction.



## PHYSICAL DISTANCING STRATEGIES

### Conference rooms, waiting rooms, receptions and other common areas:

- For workstations or open office environments, reconfigure seating such that workers are not face-to-face without an impermeable partition or equivalent. Configure physical distances within spacing and capacity requirements prescribed locally and federally.
- For conference rooms and common areas, reconfigure seating to comply with local physical distancing requirements or maintain a six-foot radius of clearance surrounding each seat. This can be achieved by ensuring that at least every other seat remains vacant and that crowding is discouraged at entry and exit points.
- Limit meetings to 10 in-person participants when physical distancing can be sustained.
- Lingering and socializing excessively pre- and post-meeting should be discouraged.
- Consider eliminating any high-traffic attractant areas such as water coolers, coffee makers, available snacks, etc.
- In dining areas and other food service areas, ensure that food service and payment queues allow for adequate physical distancing. Consider restricting access to common dining areas and configure food provision as “pick-up and pay” only.

SOCIAL DISTANCE  
IN THE WORKPLACE



### Elevators and other confined spaces with inadequate ventilation:

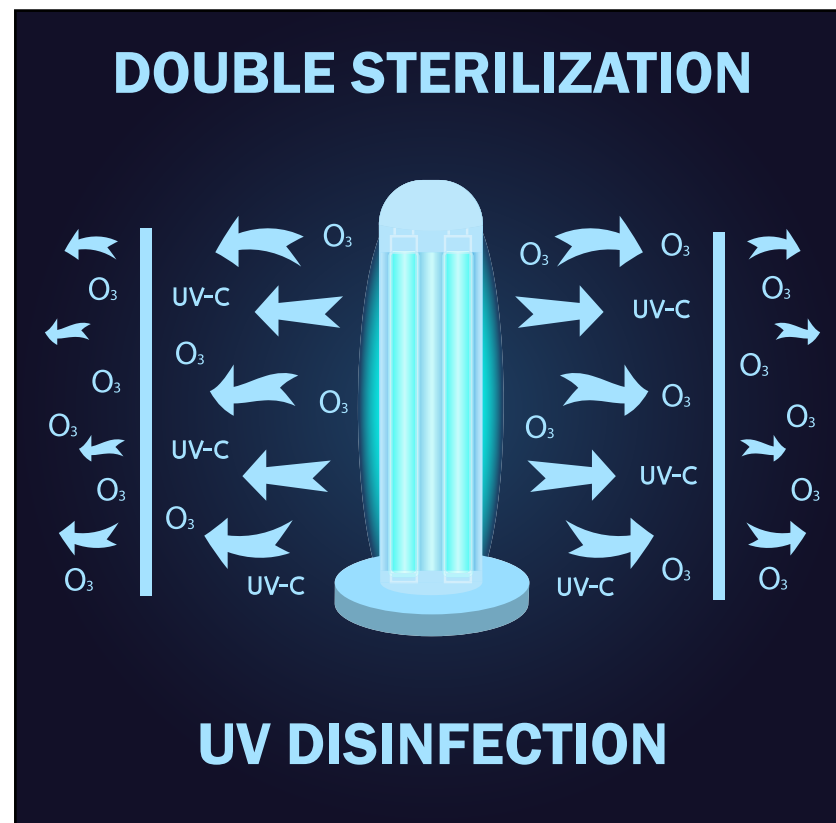
- Designate elevators and stairwells for “up” and “down” use to avoid longer ride times and cross-traffic. Consider programming elevators to return to the ground floor for faster loading.
- Establish queuing marks in elevator lobbies to reinforce social distancing and preferred travel paths. Ensure entry to lobby or elevators remains unhindered; consider using stanchions, floor decals, mats, etc., to control elevator traffic.

# PHYSICAL PLANT CONSIDERATIONS AT BUILDING RESTART



- At building restart, monitor relative humidity levels. Research suggests that maintaining relative humidity levels between 40% and 60% strikes a balance between comfort and immune response against respiratory pathogens while not promoting mold growth.
- Keep systems running longer (24/7, ideally). Increase outdoor air ventilation to full fresh air dilution with no recirculation. Disable demand-controlled ventilation and open outdoor air dampers to 100% as indoor and outdoor conditions permit.
- Consider improving HVAC filtration to MERV-13 or the highest level the system can tolerate. Note that higher filtration levels could result in higher energy costs and more frequent preventive maintenance. Additionally, HVAC systems may require new racking and sealing to ensure that filters can be placed and airflow isn't circumvented.
- For high-density work spaces with insufficient airflow, consider source control through portable room air cleaners with HEPA filters. Ultraviolet germicidal irradiation (UVGI) devices in connection with in-room fans can also manage mass high-density spaces such as conference rooms or auditoriums.

HEPA FILTERS



## RESOURCES

AIHA: [Reopening: Guidance for General Office Settings](#)

ASHRAE:

- [Standard Practice for Inspection and Maintenance of Commercial Building HVAC Systems](#)
- [Ventilation for Acceptable Indoor Air Quality](#)

BOMA: [Getting Back to Work: Preparing Buildings for Re-Entry Amid COVID-19](#)

CDC: [COVID-19 Employer Information for Office Buildings](#)