



BACK TO
**& BRICK
MORTAR**

*A Guidebook to Help
Independent Retailers
Re-Enter Storefronts Safely*

A Roadmap To Rebuilding Retail

The *Back to Brick & Mortar* guide was created by [&Access](#) as a trusted resource for business owners preparing to reopen their storefronts. With only limited protocols currently in place to maintain safe retail and restaurant environments, we drafted this guidebook in preparation for the reopening of the U.S. economy, understanding that COVID-19 will continue to impact retail for many months to come.

Rendered financially fragile by the pandemic, most small businesses do not have the luxury of a passive or iterative approach to reopening their storefronts. Their livelihood—along with the health of the community at large—relies on a swift and strategic response to the demand for a new in-store experience. The urgency is especially acute for independent retailers and restaurateurs in dense urban cores, particularly in communities of color, where coronavirus has been particularly devastating to residents' economic and physical wellbeing.

We empathize with business owners anxiously anticipating the day they can serve their customers again, facing difficult decisions in the interim like furloughing employees or incurring debt. We extend our immense gratitude to essential businesses assuming risk to continue operating and provide for their communities.

Our team has reviewed available resources to define these best practices—including World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations, federal policy, and the protocols developed by national brands and their corporate teams dedicated to operational excellence. We have distilled these resources into actionable insights and step-by-step navigation to re-create thriving stores and restaurants. We are happy to present *Back to Brick & Mortar*—a guidebook for creating an operational strategy that will safely serve your customers.

Let's open with care!

Use this guidebook to:

**Determine how and when to
reopen**

**Identify essential operations
and roles within safe, limited
reopening parameters**

**Design a reliable operating
protocol and a safe, compliant in-
store experience**

**Train employees on COVID-19
protocol**

**Communicate reopening to
customers**

About COVID-19

Why is social distancing important?

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2. Symptoms often include a fever, cough, or shortness of breath.

The virus is believed to be spread between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) and through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks.

Recent studies show that the virus can be spread by people before they develop symptoms or who never develop symptoms. It is possible that a person can contract COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes. Public understanding of how the virus spreads is evolving, so check the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) website for the latest information.](#)

Older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions may be at [higher risk for more serious complications](#) from COVID-19.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Long-Term COVID-19 Considerations:

Unfortunately, no one knows exactly how this pandemic will come to an end. Prominent models show a decrease and subsequent increase in the virus' transmission into 2021. To prepare, consider ways to reserve cash and plan to sustain your business in the event that shelter-at-home orders are reinstated.

Thank you!
Thank you!
Thank you!

This Back to Brick & Mortar guidebook was made possible by the countless hours contributed by the coalition. These professionals represent some of the best minds in the built environment industry, and a other friends and family who champion small businesses in their neighborhoods and across the nation.

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1

Deciding to Reopen

Many factors will inform your choice to reopen, and it remains your responsibility to keep customers and employees safe and healthy. Proceed with caution: consider all opportunities to realize and grow revenue as conditions change while also taking the necessary steps to mitigate the lingering effects of the virus. The goal here is to survive without the need to close permanently, so remaining closed for the first few weeks or months may prove to be a more financially and operationally sound option.



TIP 1**Check for clearance from state and local health officials.**

Guidance from government officials regarding opening may vary by state or locality. Many elected leaders are engaged in fraught political battles over when and how to reopen; regardless of this guidance, it is important to individually assess the benefits and risk associated with reopening your business.

Public health officials can provide timely and accurate information to guide your decisions and navigate the risk associated with reopening. The data and direct updates from public health agencies and departments may be more reliable than communication from elected officials when determining how to move forward. Be sure to evaluate political will and community desire to expedite a sense of normalcy against realistic public health information to inform decision-making in your business.

Check out the [State Epidemiologists List](#) and [Directory of Local Health Departments](#) to reach out to your public health officials.

TIP 2**Determine lease or mortgage requirements.**

Check your lease or mortgage documents to understand your legal obligations and options during an emergency or crisis. Every legal agreement is different, and you (or a lawyer) should carefully **review the specific language of force majeure clauses, rights to rent abatement (i.e. reduced or free rent), “go dark” provisions**, and other requirements that may be applicable during these difficult times.

Contact your landlord or lender to discuss your options. The essential question to ask is:

“Are there any forms of short- or long-term rental relief available to me?”

Your landlord or lender may be willing to negotiate and come up with creative solutions that may include a temporary rent reduction, rent deferment, or payment plans based on hours of operation. Many landlords are incentivized to find a way to keep their tenants in place rather than risk pursuing new ones—especially during an economic downturn. Obtain any agreements in writing, and if you have access to a lawyer, review to make sure that the agreement is enforceable. In the case the agreement is not enforceable, ask your lawyer to recommend edits.

[Here is a helpful database](#) outlining each state’s loan forbearance and lease enforcement policies in response to COVID-19.

TIP 3**Address employee concerns.**

Beyond its physical and economic toll, COVID-19 has had a profound emotional and psychological impact on our communities. Your employees may be grappling with these challenges in varying ways. Reach out to check on their health, to determine if they are comfortable returning to work and feel safe on their commute, and to find out if they are incentivized to remain on unemployment.

Some key questions to ask your employees include:

- **How are you feeling, mentally and physically?**
- **What unmet needs do you have right now?**
- **Are you able to return to work when we decide to re-open?**
- **How can we make it a comfortable, safe environment for you?**

Clearly communicate that the business will operate with fewer staff and hours due to occupancy limits and reduced demand. Manage expectations for varied schedules until business operations stabilize.

Consult this article from the Society of Human Resource Management for more information: [How to Support Employees with High-Risk Concerns During a COVID-19 Outbreak](#)

TIP 4**Determine occupancy limits.**

Downsize operational capacity to enable customers and employees to maintain the CDC-recommended six-foot distance from others whenever possible. Occupancy thresholds vary by jurisdiction, so consult your local planning or economic development departments for up-to-date occupancy requirements specific to your location.

Some businesses have adopted limits ranging from 20% to 50% of typical occupancy or a set number of customers per 1,000 square feet (e.g. Walmart set its limit at no more than five customers per 1,000 square feet—about 20% of the store’s capacity). Consider lower thresholds, close to 20% of the total, to underscore your commitment to your customers’ health.

[Learn more](#) about how national brand retailers are responding to the coronavirus.

INDOOR SEATING CONSIDERATIONS

Proceed with extreme caution if you decide to reinstate indoor seating in restaurants and personal service businesses. The lack of ventilation promotes virus transfer and will require cleaning between each customer. Avoid indoor seating until it is definitively safe to reintroduce it.

TIP 5**Identify essential operations.**

Your ability to reopen and thrive in the coming months requires a critical assessment of expenses, including staff and recurring costs, to maximize the revenue potential. Identify days and hours with high sales potential based on your location and customer behavior both prior to COVID-19 and moving forward. If you work in an area with limited residential units and a large white-collar workforce, you might decide to remain closed for a more extended period until employees return to their offices.

Note: essential sanitation will likely reduce the hours of operation for your shop or restaurant.

The National Retail Federation currently offers a free [Retail Industry Fundamentals](#) course that can help hone your vision.

EXPANDED OFFERING: ON-SITE GROCERY SALES AT RESTAURANTS

The state of Michigan approved restaurants to conduct retail grocery sales on site. The Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (MDARD) Food & Dairy Division manages the process, including providing FDA Labeling Waivers, recommended items, and labeling guidelines. See more on the Michigan Restaurant & Lodging Association's [website](#).

To identify essential operations for reopening, consider the following questions:

What was your main product or service before COVID-19?

Are you equipped to provide new products and/or services needed now in your community?

Which products or services have the highest profit margins and can drive revenue?

How will you produce or deliver products and/or services?

What are new ways to deliver your product or service to customers (virtual, ecommerce, social media, delivery, markets, etc.)?

What processes and which employee roles are essential to produce each product or service?

Have you contacted representatives for the business functions and processes that have legal, contractual, regulatory, or financial implications?

To determine essential staff, consider the following categories:

FINANCE

Includes accounts payable, payroll, tax, and accounting

PRODUCTION

The manufacturing of products or delivery of services, including front of house salespeople

HUMAN RESOURCES

All employee-related functions

SOURCING

Such as vendors of materials, components, supplies, and services

Finally, complete this form for each essential function.

ESSENTIAL FUNCTION FORM:

Business function: _____

Description: _____

Impact of COVID-19: _____

Which employee(s) currently perform this function? _____

Employee(s) to be trained in this function: _____

What is needed to perform the function? Consider equipment, software, and facilities. _____

What is a potential workaround if you encounter issues? _____

Revenue Prediction Worksheet

ITEM OF WORK	PROFIT + LOSSES	
	Pre-COVID	Post-COVID
Revenue		
Product/Service		
Product/Service		
Product/Service		
Online Revenue		
Total Revenue		
Direct Costs		
Gross Margin		
Gross Margin (%)		
Operating Expenses		
Salaries & Wages		
Employee Related Expenses		
Materials		
Marketing		
Professional Services		
Insurance		
Rent		
Utilities		
Contingency		
Consumables		
Working Capital		
Total Operating Expenses		
Operating Income (Gross Margin – Total Operating Expenses)		
Interest Incurred		
Depreciation and Amortization		
Income Taxes		
Total Expenses		
Net Profit (Total Revenue - Total Expenses)		

Determine whether your net profit justify re-opening and what it would take to increase revenue to sustain operations. Options might include limited goods or services to increase profit margins or requesting deferred local or state property and sales tax, rent, or payroll taxes.

Reach out to your accountant or a local [SCORE](#) or [SBA](#) office to help you with estimating revenue projections and to guide your financial strategy.

ON-GOING FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Continue to apply for federal, state, and local grant and loan programs. Check with your city and state government, economic development departments, or social service agencies for available funding. Explore private funding from local banks, investors, partners, and customers, friends, and family through crowdfunding. Consider [inKind](#) to gain equity through gift card sales or check out Alice's [small business financial resource guide](#).

TIP 7**Order Supplies**

A shock to your supply chain occurred, but, fortunately, some small businesses rely on local procurement to meet their needs. To gear up for reopening, ensure you have the key items to fulfill your essential operations, remain profitable, and, most importantly, maintain a healthy environment. Refer to other sections of this guidebook to understand the personal protective equipment (PPE) needed.

Note: The ongoing shortage of PPE might require you to establish relationships with local manufacturers who stepped up to meet the need.

CALCULATING NEEDED PPE

Use the following inventory list to identify how many of the recommended materials your business requires. To estimate your business's specific needs, create a ratio per hour per person (e.g., if you need one pair of gloves for each hour a staff member is on the clock, and have 10 staff members during a 5-hour day, the total number of gloves needed daily equals 50 pair). This list is not exhaustive, and should include others recommended by state/local guidelines.

Face coverings (note, do NOT use masks meant for healthcare workers)

Gloves

Disinfectant spray

Hand sanitizer

Soap

Disinfectant wipes

Cleaning towels

Touchless thermometer (such as this [forehead thermometer](#))

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Facilitating Healthy Business Operations

COVID-19 has created the need to alter your business operations. As what we know about the virus evolves, it is important to stay abreast of public health announcements and consider their implications for getting back to business. The following outlines tips to help.



TIP 1

Identify a COVID-19 workplace coordinator.

This person, even if it must be you, should volunteer to oversee internal protocols, processes, and ongoing communication related to COVID-19. Keep up to date with local, state, and federal guidelines and communicate them to you, the business owner, before notifying employees of any updates.

Key considerations for selecting a volunteer:

- **Can you devote time daily to check local, state, and federal public health websites for updated information?**
- **Are you comfortable communicating with employees and customers in verbal and written formats?**
- **Do you have ideas on how to best share information with customers and employees?**

Consider posting the coordinator's contact information on your website and social media to address any customer concerns directly. It might be best to operationalize this role by ensuring they are responsible for answering calls received in-store, which might require two or more coordinators to cover all shifts.

If fulfilling the duties of the workplace coordinator require overtime or at-home work, pay employees adequately for their time.

TIP 2

Develop and implement flexible leave policies.

Your employees and their families have varied levels of compromised health concerns. It is essential to support them by aligning sick leave policies with, at minimum, local public health guidance. If none are required, draft emergency sick leave policies that do not punish employees for becoming infected or needing to take care of their loved ones and bereavement policies that reassure employees of your support in case a loved one passes. Send to a HR professional to review for liabilities.

Some well-capitalized employers, such as Rite Aid, have launched “pandemic pay” to offer their employees full or partial pay if required to stay at home while sick or caring for loved ones. While “pandemic pay” may not be an option for your business in the initial months after re-opening, as revenue stabilizes you may consider creating a fund with excess revenues to pay staff.

Another option could include creating a system where healthy employees can cover leave hours at reduced pay to donate to families dealing with infection firsthand, or toward advances on future sick leave. For at-home care providers (but NOT for recovering staff members), consider assigning a task that can be completed remotely, such as ordering supplies or managing online orders.

The Society for Human Resource Managers published [a sample request for emergency paid sick leave form](#), and Mercer, a human resource consulting firm, provided some recommendations for [designing a COVID-19 emergency leave policy](#).

For additional federal guidance, refer to the Families First Coronavirus Response Act [Q+A page](#).

TIP 3

Develop and enforce personal protective equipment (PPE) policies.

Business owners are ultimately responsible for a safe and healthy workplace for their employees. As of April 2020, there are no federally mandated requirements for retail and restaurant PPE, but the CDC recommends wearing cloth face-covering in public settings where social distancing measures are challenging to maintain.

Note: Medical face masks are not recommended to preserve supply for front line medical professionals interacting with patients.

Assess the risk of exposure by identifying points in the experience where employees will come within 6 feet from a customer or another employee.

Require and provide face covering for each employee. Require and provide gloves for staff responsible for routine disinfecting and cleaning.

OSHA provides guidance for [preparing workplaces for COVID](#) alongside their standardized [PPE guide](#).

TIP 4

Design systems to monitor your supply chain.

To determine what your supply chain will look like after re-opening, start by logging all usable goods currently available on the floor or in storage, and plan to limit future product assortment to what you have defined in the essential operations section ([pg. 13](#)). By limiting on-hand inventory, you can reallocate time to creating and utilizing systems to drive revenue generation for select offerings.

Key considerations for determining inventory:

- **What does it mean for your business to hold products for long durations?**
- **Can you recycle products next year?**
- **Do they expire, requiring you to convert them to cash as soon as possible?**

Evaluate your inventory to determine which products are seasonal, and decide whether to sell at clearance prices to get cash for now or to place items in storage for later. If you proceed with sales, evaluate the impact of the price on your brand, prioritizing unpopular products for the deepest discounts and potentially saving popular products for peak season. This strategy is essential for businesses that do not sell online or via social media.

Potential inventory reporting tools that integrate into your point of sale system include:

- [Square](#),
- [ShopKeep](#), and
- [Shopify](#).

Upon opening, you will have a better understanding of the supply needed to deliver products or services. These inventory requirements will change as people grow comfortable with resuming shopping and dining out behaviors. To keep up with trends, monitor daily changes by utilizing a [spreadsheet](#) or other inventory report tool that integrates into your point of sale system. During this process calculate the change in goods or services consumed, as raw materials and final product.

Consider new sales channels to move products and generate revenue, including an online store, pop-ups, or selling at wholesale.

Additionally, you may need to find new vendors as a result of companies' strained supply chains. [Local economic development organizations](#) can provide support by connecting you with known vendors in the region.

TIP 5**Craft shift management protocol.**

Re-opening is full of unknowns for staffing. How many employees are needed daily? How many will report? How many will be healthy? The ability to answer these questions requires a daily understanding of essential operations ([pg. 13](#)), staff availability ([pg. 11](#)), and your supply chain ([pg. 25](#)).

Redesign workstation distancing to accommodate six-foot recommendations (e.g., cash register), which also dictates how many employees can be on the clock at one time.

Start with lean and split shifts, with employees on-call in case in-store traffic exceeds projections, and adapt over time to create more definitive schedules.

Add additional breaks in the typical schedule to allow for time for staff to wash hands with soap and water, remove face coverings, and get some fresh air.

Define protocol to inform staff and customers of potential exposure and staffing changes if an employee cannot report to work.

Outline how you will inform staff of exposure and go home protocol for staff who appear to be symptomatic (i.e., fever, cough, or shortness of breath). Some companies started administering temperature tests upon employee arrival, and then sent those with temperatures above 100°F home.

If an infection is confirmed, inform employees but do not share names or personal information about the person. If infected while at-work, plan to immediately close the store and follow the [Center for Disease Control's cleaning and disinfection recommendations](#).

Plan to cross-train employees on essential tasks in case of widespread infection. One critical task includes cleaning the store after closing daily. Plan the number of employees required to complete this task efficiently or hire a third-party cleaning company to assist. Note, third-party cleaning companies can limit the liability of your store if an outbreak originates from your business.

See Training Staff (pg. 47) for additional protocol to consider.

TIP 6**Maintain vendor and debtor communication.**

Your ability to pay for your financial responsibilities (e.g., inventory, loans, outstanding consulting invoices) may continue to shift day by day, especially as you try to reserve cash. Be respectful and share your plans to pay with each party on a routine basis, at least a week before the due date. Ask if there are solutions in cases where businesses are unable to pay.

Check with suppliers to ensure that they can provide goods or services as planned. If not, check the terms of your contract for any breach of Service Level Agreements (SLAs) on your business. Your insurance policy may cover violations of contract relating to delivery delays.

Try to proceed with grace while they deal with what the crisis means for their businesses. For this conversation, CityGroup created a [COVID-19 Supplier Relationship Guide](#).

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Designing a Safe Customer Experience

Operations will not resume as normal until well after the economy re-opens. The following will help you outline ways to limit exposure threats. Remember that humans are adaptive beings. However, your customers have control and can opt not to visit your store or restaurant, so designing and communicating the protocol that prioritizes their safety is essential.

For an additional resource, check out the Oklahoma Department of Commerce's [social distancing and sanitation resources by retail use](#).



TIP 1**Outline customers' previous journeys.**

You likely created an in-store/restaurant experience tailored to your business's brand, which focuses on customer services, operational efficiencies, etc. Write each step in this journey down on a piece of paper to better understand areas where you can maintain quality service while reducing physical contact to create an environment with low-risk for exposure to COVID-19 (e.g., doors operable by foot instead of hand).

AN EXAMPLE JOURNEY

The journey of a laundromat, with high exposure risk areas in yellow, is below. You will see that we typically design experiences with an abundance of physical contact points, increasing opportunities to transfer the virus.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Pull the door open to enter | 10. Place clothes in a basket to transfer to dryers |
| 2. Put clothes down | 11. Select and open the doors |
| 3. Get change from staff | 12. Start machines |
| 4. Select and open the doors of washing machines | 13. Wait in a seat for the duration of the drying process |
| 5. Load clothes | 14. Open machines |
| 6. Open and load detergent | 15. Place clothes in a basket to fold |
| 7. Close all doors and start machines | 16. Fold clothes on a table |
| 8. Wait in a seat for the duration of the wash | 17. Place clothes in a bag |
| 9. Open machines | 18. Open the door to exit |

TIP 2

Identify new, safe ways to conduct business.

Essential stores across the nation adopted order-ahead, online shopping, and delivery options to help limit the number of people inside and within 6 feet of customers and employees.

One strategy, buy online, pickup in-store (BOPIS), requires an eCommerce site, or it can be adopted to accommodate phone orders with credit card payment over the phone or pay upon arrival. When deploying, identify safe zones for customers to stand in line and pick up goods. Contactless curbside delivery complements this strategy, avoiding the need for customers entering and/or leaving their vehicles. Designate pick-up times to limit traffic at and around the store.

AN EXAMPLE

For the laundromat customer journey, a solution could be for customers to utilize full-service cleaning, dropping off clothes to the store, staff cleaning, and folding, and then offering curbside pickup during specified hours.

Deploy contactless curbside delivery by following one of the options below:

FOR CARS:

Customers drive up to the curb, and the employee requests that the customer opens the trunk and verifies the order. The employee places products in the trunk and closes it. Employees should utilize hand sanitizer immediately after closing the trunk and before engaging with the next order and customer.

FOR PEDESTRIANS AND CYCLISTS:

Situate a table between the employee and customer areas, ideally outside of the store or at the threshold to avoid the need of customers entering. The employee then places the goods ordered on the table and walks away but maintaining a visual connection with the customer picking up. Divide the tables into partitions to enable the customer to easily identify where to grab the item and the employee to quickly disinfect the area.

FOR OFF-SITE DELIVERY:

While maintaining a 6-foot distance between the customer and employee, the employee should place the item at an agreed-upon location and walk away. Check out the Center for Disease Controls What Food and Grocery Pick-up and Delivery Drivers Need to Know about COVID-19 page for more information.

Note, this list is to get your thought processes going, while formal regulations will hopefully emerge for your local the federal government. Also, consider conducting deliveries without using a third party service, unless the number of daily deliveries requires it. Most third party options collect a portion of the revenue and require the same prices offered in the store.

TIP 3

Limit customer and employee interactions.

If contactless delivery is not feasible for your business, continue to explore ways to minimize the physical contact between customers and employees, including yourself, to inhibit the transfer of the virus and risk of exposure. Refer back to the customers' journey list to identify what unneeded physical interactions exist for customers, and create a similar list for each customer-facing staff role. For example, remove all host stands and other customer service desks, if possible.

Start by enforcing your defined occupancy limits ([see pg. 12](#)). You can further the impact by dedicating hours to at-risk populations (i.e., customers over age 60, anyone with a compromised immune systems, and others) and further limiting the occupancy limits.

Do not allow people to congregate in one area at any time for any reason. Groups should be limited to families and other cohabitant groups.

Mark designated customer safe zones. These zones can be identified through taping areas or placing vinyl on the floor to identify a standing area for each customer or through a rope and stanchion systems that keep customers from congregating near work areas or each other.

Install other physical barriers to protect customers and employees. For example, grocers, pharmacies, and businesses designed with over-the-counter interactions installed plexiglass dividers to disable the virus's easy transmission.

If there are many aisles in your store, direct one-way traffic with arrows on the floor, directing everyone to a line to check out.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PERSONAL SERVICE BUSINESSES

Personal service businesses (e.g., salons, chiropractors, spas), challenged by the need to touch a customer to fulfill the order, will need to increase sanitization protocols and limit the number of customers inside at once. Appointments might be the best solution for these businesses with a staggered schedule to discourage neighboring stylists from working simultaneously, especially if their stations are closer than 6 feet. An alternative here could include reorienting each booth to maintain the recommended social distance.

TIP 4**Limit customer contact with objects and surfaces.**

Physical objects can [hold coronavirus for hours](#) and should be engaged with caution. Disallow or discourage interaction with physical objects in and outside of your store by considering the following.

Entry doors are the first opportunity to create a touch-limited experience. If possible, keep doors open to remove that step of physical contact during the experience and to increase ventilation ([see pg. 42](#)). If you cannot keep your door open, explore methods to open it with a foot, shoulder, elbow, hip, or forearm instead of hands. Search local hardware stores for these devices. Don't forget to disinfect regularly.

Prohibit self-serve items and product sampling, including grab and go offerings, buffets, or any other things shared across customers.

Trash cans should be left open to avoid hand contact.

Provide space between each shelved item with signage throughout that states, "please decide on a product before touching it and, if not needed, bring the item to a sales associate."

Most businesses will require the continued use of credit card machines and some other shared objects such as refrigerator doors, pens, etc. Place a wipeable cover on the machine and disinfect before and after each use. Consider asking customers to wipe down these objects after each use with wipes provided nearby.

An alternative to credit card machines might include a third-party digital checkout, such as PayPal or Square, to limit contact. To deploy this strategy, consider printing your username on a sheet of paper and placing it at each zone designated to receive customer payment.

If workstations, machines, or other tools require sharing, consider limiting to one person at a time to maintain the 6 foot recommended distance or mandating the use of face covers and gloves.

In all cases, remember to disinfect by using products that meet [EPA's criteria](#) and are appropriate for the surface, including diluted household bleach solutions prepare according to the manufacturer's label or alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol.

Restrooms

Due to the number of surfaces that require contact, restrooms should be closed to the public unless customers remain on premises for over an hour on average. In cases where customers use restrooms, designate an employee to clean after each use. Employees should have similar disinfectant processes to deploy before and after their use.

TIP 5**Define customer queueing protocol.**

With limited occupancy, you should expect customers to line up to receive your goods or services. Reinforce social distancing protocol in and outside of your store through the use of safe zone markers ([see pg. 35](#)).

Ensure that queueing occurs outdoors, to the greatest extent possible. As warmer months emerge, consider shading devices to make the experience comfortable for customers, and encourage them to order ahead to speed up the process and reduce exposure. Be sure to check with your local planning and public works departments to determine what policies govern the use of the sidewalk.

For larger stores with high occupancy limits, consider assigning a staff person to control the number of people who enter. Once the store reaches its occupancy limit, the door patron will allow one person in for each one that exits.

When possible, utilize drive-throughs or contactless curbside delivery ([see pg. 33](#)) to limit the need to stand outside or in the building.

TIP 6

Explore creative uses of outdoor space.

Space immediately outside of your business may be leveraged to create safe operations, including outdoor vending, signage, and seating, once public health officials deem it safe. These creative explorations promote social distancing while customers are in line or would like to enjoy some fresh air and enable your brand to leave the four walls to create a place people will enjoy visiting again.

Engage your local planning department to understand if sidewalks, alleyways, and parking lots are available for use, as the ability to utilize outdoor space will vary by city and zoning restrictions.

Leverage curbside parking spaces as a drive-through, contactless curbside pickup options, or a beautified area to serve as seating (one party per table).

Reach out to technical assistance providers, such as economic development organizations, Main Streets, and the local small business development center to support you as you consider what is feasible. These organizations can serve as liaisons between city policies and your business's operation.

TIP 7**Increase ventilation.**

Opening doors and windows will help curb virus transmission and limit the moisture in and stagnation of the air, known causes of virus growth, and transmission. Although natural ventilation proves to be more effective than air conditioning, consider turning on and installing additional fans or other air purification devices to circulate and clean the air. This strategy is essential for retailers whose customers visit for long periods, such as personal service businesses (e.g., salons and spas).

Read more on the [impact of ventilation here](#).

TIP 8**Integrate hygiene products.**

Customers and employees have to change their behavior to navigate your store or restaurant safely.

Place sanitation and cleaning supplies at points of physical interaction, including soap and water or hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol to clean hands upon entrance and at common interaction points, such as the cash register. Disinfectant wipes can complement hand cleanliness; instruct customers and staff to use routinely to ensure physical objects do not pose a risk.

Check out the EPA's [Registered Antimicrobial Products for Use Against Novel Coronavirus](#) or follow the World Health Organization's Guide to [Hand Sanitizer Production](#) if you need to make your own.

TIP 9

Guide customers safely through the experience.

Clear and effective communication during the customer's in-store experience is essential to lessening the concerns associated with the many changes to shopping or dining or dine.

Design, print, and put up signs related to the protocols you created in this and previous sections.

Place a poster in the window or outside the entrance detailing the new occupancy limit and outlining essential ways you are responding to COVID-19 to ensure customer safety. Signs should be legible from 20 feet away to communicate to drivers and others passing by the store.

If customers will enter, guide them through the experience with signs on floors and walls stating where to stand, which direction to travel, or detailing menus of products or services. Consider the use of sandwich boards if your business is in an expansive space.

Provides signs near shelved products instructing customers to decide on an item before touching it or placing it in their basket. Further instruction should direct them to avoid placing items back on the shelf after touching.

Conduct routine announcements, reiterating social distancing and touch-limited protocol.

Check out FedEx's [COVID-19 Signage Templates](#) to get you started.

4

Training Employees

The previous Tips should inform both communications and training practices for your employees. Be sure to be empathetic throughout this process. Everyone processes trauma differently, and the ability to digest and retain information varies. As such, repeat information regularly and/or consider creating a video for employees to reference.

Consider conducting all training and other meetings via videoconferencing or teleconferencing platform to limit unsafe social distancing. Sample platforms include: [WebEx](#), [Zoom](#), and [Google Meet](#). If possible, use password protected lines to avoid being hacked.

The Society of Human Resource Management has [a webpage dedicated to the pandemic](#) with resources on procedures and policy creation.



TIP 1**Develop a new staffing plan.**

Upon the decision to re-open, determine whether you plan to hire old or new employees. All staff might not be able to return, or you may decide it is in the best interest of the business to hire new staff members. Be thoughtful about who you hire. Consider carefully wages and shifts offered to maintain brand integrity and customer service standards.

Prioritize hiring staff that have a track record of reporting on time and following protocol closely to avoid operational mishaps. Offer staff comparable or increased wages to make up for reduced hours, if your business plans can absorb the costs.

Create shifts that consider the specialized needs of the differing age groups that you employ to reduce infection risk. Employees over 60 and with underlying health concerns are at greater risk. Be respectful of health disclosure policies when inquiring, as you cannot force employees to reveal an underlying health concern. However, at-risk employees should check with the Americans with Disabilities Act to pursue [reasonable accommodations](#), such as unpaid leave.

TIP 2**Host a remote on-boarding conference.**

Deciding to re-enter the workplace may be hard for many employees. Have an all-staff video call or teleconference to discuss concerns raised during one-on-one calls conducted ([see pg. 11](#)). During the call, be sure to remind employees of any sick, family support, and bereavement benefits that are available and designed with their concerns in mind.

Discuss changes in operating protocol, planned hours, and days of operation.

Introduce the COVID-19 workplace coordinator, and ask them to explain the safety protocol. Be sure to discuss in great detail the use of face coverings and gloves, sanitation and disinfection protocol, and social distancing instructions.

Provide space for employee input on how information reviewed can be improved to create a safer environment.

Send any referenced documents and addressed concerns/changes via email or upload them to your business's website for employees to continually access.

TIP 3

Create protocols for employee and customer interactions.

Your employees are the front line in the maintenance of a safe and healthy environment, and most transmissions occur between people. The exact protocol for staff and customer interaction will vary by category of business, operating procedures, number of staff, and occupancy limits. Refer back to Limit Customer and Employee Interactions ([pg. 35](#)) for guidance on the customer experience and instruct staff to do the following:

Remain 6 feet apart from customers and other employees at all times, if possible. When the need arises to engage within the 6 feet, be sure to position your face covering correctly. Review face-covering instructions in the callout on [pg. 50](#), and if you need to [create a cloth face covering](#), the Center for Disease Control has you covered.

Request that employees to provide notification if they have a compromised immune system and would like to request special accommodations. These accommodations could include conducting a task at home or while the store is closed (see [pg. 47](#) for more information).

Maintain proper hand hygiene to protect yourself and others by washing with soap and water regularly for at least 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

Require the following times to clean hands:

- **Before leaving and upon arriving home**
- **Upon arriving to and leaving work**
- **Before and after engaging with customers and other employees**
- **Before and after putting on, touching, or removing face covering**
- **After touching frequently touched objects and surfaces**
- **Before and after sneezing (sneeze into tissue and place into the trash)**

Refer to the Center for Disease Control's guide on how to [safely remove gloves](#).

How to use a face covering?

- 1. Before putting on a covering, clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.**
- 2. Cover mouth and nose with covering, making sure there are no gaps between your face and the covering.**
- 3. Avoid touching the covering while using it; if you do, clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.**
- 4. If possible, replace the covering with a new/clean one as soon as it is damp and do not re-use single-use coverings.**
- 5. To remove the coverings: remove it from behind (do not touch the front of the mask); discard immediately in a closed bin; clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.**

(Source: [World Health Organization](#))

TIP 4**Teach operating protocol.**

You should have memorized your operating protocol at this stage, including the design of the customer experience, employee's standard operating procedures, and any additional cleaning and disinfecting protocol. During initial training, outline the decisions made in the Designing a Healthy Experience section ([pg. 30](#)) and consider adding the following instructions.

Clean and disinfect surfaces regularly with EPA-registered household disinfectant or diluted household bleach. For surfaces routinely touched, disinfect after every person, if possible. Daily, while the store is closed, clean all surfaces. Make sure employees wear gloves and have proper ventilation when using cleaning/disinfectant products.

A BASELINE FOR INFECTION CONTROL

Cosmetology and Barber Boards have facility and infection control standards which provides a great basis of cleaning behaviors and should be paired with social distancing protocol and PPE. Take a look at [Ohio's cosmetology standards](#).

Conduct routine announcements, reiterating social distancing and touch-limited protocol.

Instruct employees, upon returning home, to remove clothing immediately and shower to avoid the potential transfer of the coronavirus to your loved ones and household materials.

Cross-train essential functions to prepare for instances when many employees become infected with COVID-19. To help with social distancing, consider splitting shifts with as few as possible staff in each. If absenteeism spikes due to infection or other causes, employees can conduct numerous shifts.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has [detailed building disinfecting guidelines](#) and [safe glove removal practices](#) to inform your procedures.

TIP 5**Reduce exposure risks.**

Do not base your determination of risk or infection on race or country of origin.

Examine all employees upon arrival to work. Send employees who appear to have symptoms home immediately. Consider taking employee temperatures to ensure none have fevers (temperatures above 100°F) and look out for coughs and shortness of breath during the examination. Note, record baselines for each employee as internal temperatures vary. While examining, be sure to wear gloves and face coverings. See next page for guidance.

If an employee or customer reports a confirmed infection, employers should inform employees and maintain confidentiality. Do not share any personal information about the infected employee, including their name.

Utilize the following questions to conduct examinations daily:

1. Have you or anyone in your household been tested for COVID-19?

Yes or No

If Yes,

Positive or Negative

2. What is your temperature today?

(Log reading)

3. Has anyone in your household had a fever in the past 72 hours?

Yes or No

4. Do you or anyone in your household have a cough, trouble breathing, or shortness of breath?

Yes or No

5. Have you or anyone in your household had close contact with any person, including a healthcare worker, who has tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 14 days?

Yes or No

If yes, the date of contact was?

6. Have you or anyone in your household had close contact with someone under investigation for COVID-19 within the past 14 days?

Yes or No

If yes, the date of contact was?

If possible, keep a log of each employee's responses in a spreadsheet to help trace exposure over time. [Google Forms](#) is a free resource to create and administer the survey.

5

Communicating With Customers

Constant and consistent communication with your customers will help establish and maintain trust—helping you sustain customer engagement and drive revenue during the re-emergence period.



TIP 1**Maintain engagement before reopening.**

In all communications, offer solutions to current problems, whether offering a laugh during discouraging times, conveying personalized information related to your business, or sharing on-brand tips on how to stay safe. Consider posting across your social media pages a few times a week.

TIP 2**Build anticipation.**

People are anxious to understand what getting back out safely looks like, and social media is a key tool in communicating to your customers about your new protocols. Create and post short videos with your phone or simple graphics to illustrate the changes. This will help minimize shock and lower the anxiety associated with being ill-prepared for an experience.

Plan your social media content in the days leading up to re-opening. Take a look at social media posts of stores that are already open to see how they're handling things.

A few examples of strategic external communications outlining protocols to ensure proper distancing include:

- **“Cutting your hair at home didn’t turn out well? We’re happily re-opening in three days. Check out our website to learn about how we prioritize your safety and your hairstyle.”**
- **“We miss you! Please stop by to see us and our safe social distancing protocols, if you feel comfortable of course. If not, we’re open online!”**
- **“Curbside latte? We’re open with contactless curbside delivery to keep you safe.”**

TIP 3

Update your website with COVID-19 protocol.

Update your company website by outlining the ways you will maintain a safe environment and the new days and hours of operation. Consider a COVID-19 FAQ page with store hours, products and services offered, a detailed explanation of your sanitary practices, and contact information.

Check out [*Mom's Organic Market's COVID-19 information page*](#) for inspiration.

TIP 4**Brief media on new hours and operations.**

Most people will discover whether your store is open through mediums other than your website, so be sure to post any changes on social media and online portals, including [Facebook](#), [Google](#) and [Apple Maps](#)—especially current hours and days of operation and options for delivery or curbside pickup, if applicable.

Share updates with local chambers, business improvement districts (BIDS), and Main Streets organizations, which will often help to market your business through their networks and can help connect you to other resources available.

TIP 5

Incorporate on-site instructions to clarify the customer journey.

Some customers might not have social media or engage with your website before visiting, and will be looking for in-person instructions on how to navigate the experience. Post signs throughout your store and make announcements to familiarize customers with safety protocols, including how many customers are allowed inside at a given time and reminders of social distancing recommendations. Make instructions easy to understand by using floor vinyls or assigning staff to guide customers.

Note: if you decide to require customer temperature screenings before entering into your establishment, carefully communicate your rationale and the process before and during the screening process.

TIP 6**Devise a notification policy for in-store infections.**

As of April 2020, stores are not required to notify customers when an employee or another customer tests positive for COVID-19, yet some stores such as Trader Joe's and Sprouts are opting for full transparency. Sharing the number of confirmed employee cases and the date they were last in the store is a way of building trust—but could deter customers and result in a decline in revenue. Due to the lack of testing sites, employees might not find out their positive until a week after they were first sent home for being symptomatic. Use your judgment to determine the most suitable approach to keep your customers safe and informed without causing unnecessary panic.

TIP 7

Assess the customer experience routinely, and adapt as needed.

Continue prioritizing customers' feeling of safety and satisfaction after their experience engaging with your new operations. Methods to receive feedback can include simple surveys via social media or more detailed questions through your or a third-party website such as TypeForm. Take liberty to engage in a conversation with customers before they depart (from six feet away of course).

Sample questions to ask include:

- **From 1 to 10 how would you rank your experience?**
- **Did you feel safe during your visit, consider our COVID-19 protocol?**
- **How can we make the experience better for you and your family?**
- **How likely are you to visit us again while COVID-19 infections remain a threat?**

Learn how to create a poll via [Instagram](#) or [Facebook](#).

Other Resources



Workplace Resources:

- [Getting your workplace ready for COVID-19](#) (World Health Organization)
- [Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#) (Center for Disease Control)
- [Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#) (Center for Disease Control)
- [Workplace Safety Guides](#) (U.S. Department of Labor)

COVID-19 Health Facts

- [Helpful information on Ventilation and Airborne Diseases](#) (World Health Organization)
- [Bacteria and Viruses](#) (American Lung Association)

Guidance and Examples for Leasing and Tenant Support

- [Commercial Lease Workouts](#)
- [How Main Street \[Property\] Owners Are Working with Tenants](#)
- [Roadmap for CRE loan document review during COVID-19](#)
- [Loan Forbearance and Lease Enforcement in Response to COVID-19](#)

Employee Resources and Supports

- [Designing a COVID-19 Emergency Leave Policy](#)
- [COVID-19 and the Family and Medical Leave Act Q&A](#)
- [Families First Coronavirus Response Act: Q&A](#)
- [Sample Emergency Paid Sick Leave Request Form](#)
- [Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#)

Up-to-Date Industry Trends

- [Tracking Retail's Response to the Coronavirus](#)

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