

Phase III guidance for workplace common areas

Follow these tips to stay safe while using common areas at work and help lower the chances of catching and spreading COVID-19. Common areas can include conference rooms, kitchens, cafeterias, dining rooms, and other break areas. Employers must follow all laws and regulations regarding face masks and the operation of kitchens, cafeterias, and dining rooms.

Employee schedules and interactions

- Consider closing common areas if possible. If not, instruct employees to avoid using and eating in these areas when possible.
- Avoid in-person office celebrations.
- Ask employees to stay home when they have [symptoms](#) of COVID-19 or have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19. Learn more about [quarantine and isolation](#).
- Limit the number of people allowed in common areas at one time based on total square footage and six-foot social distancing requirements.
- Rearrange furniture, remove furniture, and/or mark spaces in common areas to ensure that people stay at least six feet apart from each other.
- Encourage employees to eat meals or take breaks outdoors or in their work spaces whenever possible and as weather permits.
- Discourage employees from sharing food.
- Find creative ways to reduce the number of people employees come into contact with, such as:
 - If possible, designate 'in' and 'out' doors to common areas to control the flow of people.
 - Stagger arrival, lunch, and break times to reduce bottlenecks and the number of people using each common area at the same time.
 - Limit the frequency and size of in-person meetings, such as by using videoconferencing within and outside of the workplace.
 - When possible, create consistent pods or teams of employees that work together in shifts.
 - Assign a specific work area for each employee to limit movement through the work space.
 - Discourage employees from entering each other's office, work space, or cubicle.
 - Encourage employees to use inboxes outside of their work spaces where others can leave documents and mail instead of entering the employee's workspace.

General guidance

- Post signs in the common area reminding employees about the three Ws: Wear your mask, Wash your hands, and Watch your distance:
 - Wear a [face mask](#) that's at least two layers thick and fits snugly but comfortably over your nose, mouth, and chin without any gaps.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or carry and use hand sanitizer that's at least 60% alcohol.
 - Watch your distance by staying at least six feet apart from others.
- Ensure there are enough hand sanitizer and/or handwashing stations available for employees to use.
- Instruct employees not to share dishes, cups, or eating utensils.
- Instruct employees to handle used, non-disposable food service items with gloves and to wash them with dish soap and hot water or in a dishwasher. Provide disposable gloves for employee use.

REOPENING RI

- Provide employees with supplies for cleaning shared cooking utensils, such as knives, ladles, and spatulas, and shared appliances, such as stoves, microwaves, coffee machines, and refrigerators.
- Instruct employees to wash their hands after handling used food service items.
- Increase air flow in common areas by opening windows and doors whenever possible. Learn more about [preventing the spread of COVID-19 through air circulation](#).
- Ensure that common areas used by employees are [cleaned](#) multiple times a day. Consider posting a cleaning schedule for all employees to see.
- Provide cleaning materials for employees to clean the space they used once they are finished.