



Pandemic Guide

For Real Estate Managers

Resources for Reopening Your Property

► April 2020

For those who manage to make a difference.™



IREM® Pandemic Guide

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April 30, 2020

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Introduction

Once the spread of infectious disease has slowed to a manageable level, public health authorities typically begin to lift restrictions on life and business. You need to be prepared for when this happens—and your property must be ready to reopen in a safe and responsible manner.

It's important to remember that reopening your property will not be a "flip the switch" event. It will require some planning, preparation, and prioritization. Reopening may occur in phases to support social (physical) distancing and other disease prevention measures.

Operations at office, retail, and industrial properties will be different than those under normal circumstances. Balancing how to prevent the spread of disease and meet the needs of tenants will be a challenge. Life on residential properties will move forward in steps as you make areas and amenities, such as clubhouses and swimming pools, available for use again.

You may have had ways of doing things that worked for your property prior to a pandemic and that may work again – but were those ways the best? Or did you discover new, better ways as you shifted on the fly to respond to the pandemic?

Your goal is to end up with the most effective processes in leasing, maintenance, and other areas of operations—those you'd had in place before the pandemic, and those you've applied for the pandemic that work even better than previous practices.

You'll likely need to adjust as there are new developments and guidance from public health authorities. You'll also adjust as you learn lessons in the initial phases of reopening.

We've created this guide to help you navigate these issues. The checklists in the guide serve as a framework for reopening your property and getting back to, if not pre-pandemic operations, a new normal where you and your stakeholders can resume your businesses and lives.

For IREM's full pandemic guide, including resources for reopening, visit irem.org/pandemic-guide.

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Pandemics and reopening your property

Reopening your property responsibly and safely requires preparation, communication, and agility. It also requires coordination and cooperation with your stakeholders, including owners, staff, tenants/residents, and service providers.

Consider the following key points on reopening your property.

Follow public health department dates and guidelines

First in importance: reopening according to the dates, guidelines, and procedures of the public health department.

Resist pressure from any of your stakeholders, including owners and tenants/residents, to deviate from those dates and guidelines. The financial impact of pandemics is typically severe, so you may face clients or tenants eager to get operations back to normal. Likewise, residents at multifamily communities may be eager to use the amenities available to them and enjoy the property to its fullest.

However, you, your company, your client, your tenants/residents, and the property could be liable for reopening sooner than authorized or without adhering to safety guidelines, such as social distancing measures. Companies and properties could also face reputation impacts for deviating from guidelines.

For COVID-19, many governments have released guidelines that reopen their countries in phases. They often provide guidance for different audiences, including employers and business operators, on policies and practices that mitigate the spread of the disease. State/province and local jurisdictions often provide more specific guidance, as well as reopening dates.

You'll need to get up to speed on all the guidance that applies to your property – and follow the most stringent precautions and procedures.

Use clear and consistent communication

Another key consideration: communications to your staff and tenants/residents. You will likely have been communicating with them throughout the pandemic, and you should continue to be clear and consistent with what you've been doing into the phase of the pandemic where reopening becomes possible. That said, you'll need to assess and reset as you go. Set clear expectations in advance, but be flexible to fit the fluid nature of this event.

As you plan to reopen the property, you'll need to work with staff and tenants/residents on roles and responsibilities. Do not make assumptions about who is responsible for supplying equipment or adjusting operations. Some of the responsibilities raised by reopening a property will probably not be addressed in the lease, so you need to do your homework.

For example, if the health department or a tenant's company requires temperature or health checks at the property entrance, who will supply the thermometers or temperature scanners?

Who will do the screening as people enter the building? What party is liable if screening fails to prevent an outbreak? In this case, you would need to consult legal counsel, agree with the tenant on which party is responsible for the screening, and potentially secure equipment and/or service providers.

Prepare

Preparation before reopening is critical. Different asset types will need different types of planning and preparation. The types of tenants and/or resident populations will also guide what you and your team will do for reopening day and beyond.

Key areas of preparation include:

- Determining your role and liability in preventing the spread of disease
- Participating in planning with your stakeholders, including owner, tenants/residents, and service providers
- Coordinating with staff and service providers on an operating plan
- Setting a cleaning and sanitizing regimen
- Stocking enough cleaning and hygiene products
- Adding signage, barriers, and floor markings for social distancing
- Taking care of any deferred maintenance
- Performing preventive maintenance
- Ready equipment for startup
- Adjusting equipment for new operating conditions
- Making sure building systems support good indoor air quality (IAQ) and do not promote the spread of disease
- Planning for sanitary waste management practices

Be flexible

It's important to build flexibility into your planning. From the first day of the property's reopening, you'll need to observe whether the systems and processes in place are working as intended. Regular team meetings, where you assess what works and what doesn't, continued virtually if necessary, can help you be nimble and make changes. So can listening to your stakeholders. Solicit their feedback—virtually, of course—and acknowledge their contributions.

We've all seen how quickly things change and develop during a pandemic. Make sure you keep lines of communication with public health officials open, watch for any new guidance, and respond as conditions warrant.

Key points on reopening your property

1. Adhere to health department dates and guidelines.
2. Resist any pressure to deviate from those dates and guidelines.
3. Use clear and consistent communications with staff and tenants/residents.
4. Prepare the property before re-occupancy to be ready for reopening day.
5. Be flexible as operations restart and adjust as necessary.

Resources for reopening your property

The remainder of this guide provides checklists to help you and your team reopen your property.

The following items are included:

- A checklist to help you reopen your property
 - The items in this checklist are divided into sections: communication, disease prevention, and operations and maintenance.
 - Use this checklist for any type of property you manage.
- Additional checklists with items specific to reopening industrial properties, office buildings, multifamily communities, and retail properties
- A workplace checklist for you and your team to use in management and leasing offices and for tenants to use in their offices

Property reopening checklist

Basic information

Key dates

Sector authorized to reopen on	Property to reopen on

Property information

Property name	
City and state/province	
Owner	
Major tenant(s) as applicable	

Public health information

Health department in area of property	
Reopening requirements	<input type="checkbox"/> Social distancing <input type="checkbox"/> Public health inspections <input type="checkbox"/> PPE <input type="checkbox"/> Limit on gatherings Max. #: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Temperature/health checks

Communications

Staff relations

- Review employee policies and make changes as needed
- Review staff levels and job positions and make changes as needed
- Communicate changes to policies, staffing, and job positions
- Determine which members of team must return to site work versus remote work or other arrangements
- File necessary paperwork to designate applicable employees as essential workers per state/province and local requirements
- Work with staff to develop goals for reopening, such as catching up on outstanding maintenance on a schedule or sticking to the cleaning regimen
- Set clear expectations with team and each team member on their responsibilities

- Decide if temperature/health screenings will be required for staff
- Give clear directions on cleaning, handwashing and -sanitizing, using PPE, and adhering to social distancing practices
- Stress the need for employees to report any pandemic-related illness and stay home if they become sick
- Review what happens when an employee or tenant/resident reports pandemic-related symptoms
- Discuss tenants/residents and their needs, especially those with special requirements or challenging circumstances
- Remain sensitive to employees with health conditions, sick family members, childcare responsibilities, and other pandemic-related challenges

Tenant/resident relations

- Provide tenants/residents with resources on accessing financial support, as necessary
- Stay updated on rent collections, delinquencies, and lease negotiations and disputes
- Continue to apply company rent collection policy and consult legal counsel on lease issues as necessary
- Determine requirements and responsibilities around temperature/health screenings of tenants/residents and others entering property, as necessary
- Set a plan and schedule for regular communications to tenants/residents upon reopening

Service provider relations

- Exchange pandemic response plans with key service providers
- Confirm that service providers are operational
- Arrange for backup/replacement service providers as necessary
- Review with service providers social distancing and safety measures they will follow onsite

Disease prevention

Cleaning and sanitizing

- Send tenants/residents resources on cleaning procedures and be available to provide support
- Adjust and verify cleaning schedule and methods with cleaning service provider
- Follow [CDC guidance](#) on cleaning and disinfecting
- Check that cleaning products meet [EPA criteria](#) for use against infectious diseases

- Clean and disinfect all management-controlled areas:
 - Entrances
 - Vestibules and lobbies
 - Reception and security desks
 - Restrooms
 - Offices
 - Kitchens
 - Elevator banks
 - Corridors
 - Fitness centers
 - Business centers
 - Other areas as applicable to property
- Disinfect surfaces (e.g., tables, chairs, counters, doorknobs) frequently
- Verify that property has enough cleaning supplies for frequent cleaning
- Verify that property has enough hygiene products, including tissues, disinfectant wipes, hand soap, and hand sanitizer
- Install hand sanitizer stations at entrance and in high-traffic areas
- Install handwashing reminder signs in restrooms
- Remove or disable high-touch surfaces, such as touch-screen kiosks and vending machines
- Install touchless technology where possible
- Provide hand sanitizer or disinfectant wipes near other high-touch surfaces
- Decide if you will require PPE in common areas (may depend on state/province or local guidelines)
- Stock PPE, including masks and gloves, for property team
- Advise team on use and disposal of PPE for cleaning and maintenance tasks
- Advise property team on hygiene protocol, including handwashing and sanitizing

Social distancing

- Have staff actively encourage social distancing
- Install plexiglass guards where needed (e.g., reception desk)
- Set an occupancy limit for common areas
- Use signage, floor markings, and barriers to create one-way lanes, queues, and zones to support social distancing
- Decide when shared spaces (e.g., fitness center, café) will open
- Adjust security/sign-in practices to minimize contact (e.g., no shared pens)
- Install signs with social distancing guidelines and reminders
- Post visible guidelines for use of elevators, escalators, and stairways
- Create boxes in corners of elevators using decals or colored tape to indicate standing areas and directions
- Set protocols for use of stairways:
 - No passing allowed
 - Stay on side near wall
 - Maintain at least three stairs' distance

Operations and maintenance

Equipment startup

- Inspect building systems, as applicable, for damage or problems:
 - Access control
 - Elevators/escalators
 - Lighting
 - Potable water
 - Sewer
 - Fire and life safety
 - HVAC
 - Stormwater management
 - Other systems as applicable to property
- Perform preventive maintenance, as well as any work deferred by shutdown
- Adjust operating schedules, settings, and set points for occupancy schedules and season
- Flush hot and cold water through all points of use—see [CDC guidelines](#) on minimizing risk of Legionnaires' disease associated with water systems after prolonged shutdowns
- Flush and disinfect toilets and urinals
- Consider engaging service provider for water quality testing
- Review utilities billing and usage from months of shutdown for errors and anomalies
- Observe equipment operation on start-up

Indoor air quality (IAQ)

- Determine current fresh and recycled air mix
- Increase fresh air as possible
- Change filters on outdoor and return air systems
- Determine highest [MERV rating](#) possible with property's HVAC system
 - Install filters with MERV rating of at least 13 (minimum rating required to trap respiratory particles) if possible
 - Check compatibility of HEPA filters (MERV rating 16+) with system
- Have duct system cleaned and disinfected regularly
- Obtain IAQ testing, including analysis of [particulate matter](#), for management-controlled areas
- Explore installation of IAQ monitoring equipment, including CO₂ sensors, which can alert management to malfunctioning ventilation components

Waste management

- Designate special waste containers for used PPE
- Sanitize waste and recycling receptacles frequently
- Review waste management billing from months of shutdown for any errors or anomalies
- Maintain a clean and orderly trash room/dumpster area

Ongoing operations

- Send tenants/residents updates on any changes to operations
- Provide tenants/residents with any new health department guidance
- Discuss with legal counsel your responsibilities and liability in cooperating with public health officials, such as contact tracers investigating disease outbreaks
- Follow cleaning and sanitizing regimen and adjust as necessary
- Reinforce social distancing and hygiene practices with staff and tenants/residents
- Respond if illness is reported in the property:
 - Close affected area
 - Flush with fresh air if possible
 - Wait at least 24 hours before disinfecting
 - Disinfect according to [CDC guidance](#)
 - Send tenants/residents appropriate information, while maintaining privacy, if illness is determined

Reopening an industrial property

- Send tenant(s) resources on resuming business operations and be available to provide support.
Try to provide information relevant to the tenant's specific business. Examples include:
 - [IWLA](#) (warehousing and logistics)
 - [National Association of Manufacturers](#)
 - [Association for Packaging and Processing Technologies](#)
- Send tenant(s) resources on cleaning procedures and be available to provide support
- Send tenant(s) resources on social distancing in workplaces. Measures include:
 - Distance between workers
 - Staggered work shifts
 - Remote working
 - Physical barriers (e.g., plexiglass)
 - Flexible, nonpunitive leave policies
- Send tenant(s) resources on IAQ management and be available to provide support
- Inspect site for issues and maintenance needs:
 - Landscaping
 - Parking areas and lighting
 - Pavement, asphalt, and other hard surfaces
 - Stormwater management system and site features
 - Other site features as applicable
- Inspect building envelope for issues and maintenance needs:
 - Exterior
 - Foundation
 - Roof
 - Any other components under management control

Reopening an office building

- Exchange pandemic response plans with tenants
- Send tenants resources on social distancing in workplaces. Measures include:
 - Distance between workers
 - Staggered work shifts
 - Remote working
 - Physical barriers (e.g., plexiglass)
 - Flexible, nonpunitive leave policies
- Support tenants in space reconfigurations that support social distancing
- Decide when to resume in-person tenant engagement events
- Decide when any food courts, convenience stores, coffee shops, and restaurants can open (public health authorities may set different dates for this sector)
- Decide when to open plazas, green space, and other exterior amenities
- Coordinate with contracted services typically on site, such as parking, security, and janitorial
- Use stanchions and decals to set queues at security and concierge desks, elevators, and other areas where lines typically form
- Set protocols for mail and package delivery that limit contact
- Set up temperature/health screenings at management-controlled entrances, as necessary
- Determine if elevators can be adjusted to limit occupancy
- Determine if BMS/BAS allows for tracking of IAQ issues
- Decide when to resume tenant build-outs and any other construction projects
- Require good IAQ management in construction practices

Reopening a multifamily community

- Decide if you will require PPE in common areas
- Determine requirements and responsibilities around checking temperatures/health of residents, prospect, guests, employees, and others entering property, if necessary
- Decide when to resume resident engagement events. Choose events that meet the needs of the residents at this time (e.g., wellness-related, remote working tips).
- Decide when each shared space will open considering any state/province and local public health department guidelines:
 - Business center
 - Clubhouse
 - Community rooms
 - Fitness center/wellness amenities
 - Grilling areas
 - Kitchen
 - Laundry room
 - Lounges and sitting areas
 - Meeting spaces
 - Playground/children's play areas
 - Swimming pool
 - Other spaces as applicable to the property
- Provide for receipt and contactless delivery of packages. Hold packages in lobby or leave outside unit doors.
- Create and send out guidelines for use of clubhouses, community rooms, fitness centers, kitchens, pools, laundry rooms, and other shared spaces
 - Post social distancing and hygiene reminders in these areas
 - Provide disinfectants for residents to sanitize equipment after use
 - Remove as many high-touch points as possible
 - Increase cleaning frequency for these spaces
- Decide which parts of leasing process to continue virtually
- Create a plan for resuming in-person leasing activities
- Continue a move-in process that supports social distancing (e.g., help residents virtually)
- Perform preventive maintenance on unit HVAC systems
- Decide when to resume routine maintenance requests
- Define process and requirements for maintenance requests:
 - What instructions will you give the resident?
 - How many maintenance staff are required to respond to requests?
 - What PPE should maintenance staff wear?
- Determine when and how to resume unit inspections
- Provide guidelines to contracted resident services on the property regularly, such as dog walkers, valet waste, concierge services, and fitness trainers

Reopening a retail property

- Exchange pandemic plans with tenants
- Use state/province and local public health department guidelines in setting reopening dates for different types of tenants, including:
 - Bars and clubs
 - Fitness centers
 - Hair salons
 - Kiosk vendors
 - Movie theaters
 - Restaurants
 - Others as applicable to the property
- Support tenants with resources on reopening stores. Best practices for retail operations include:
 - Curbside pickups and returns
 - Store occupancy limits
 - Signage, floor markings, barriers, and one-way lanes to support social distancing
 - Installation of plexiglass guards
 - Changes to hours (e.g., limited hours, hours dedicated to elderly and those with compromised immune systems)
 - Shopping by appointment
 - Distance between guests and workers
 - Staggered work shifts
 - Remote working
 - Flexible, nonpunitive leave policies
 - See National Retail Federation's [Operation Open Doors checklist](#) for other best practices
- Decide when each common area space will reopen considering any state/province and local public health department guidelines:
 - Food courts
 - Lounges and sitting areas
 - Playgrounds/children's play areas
 - Other spaces as applicable to the property
- Plan parking and traffic lanes to support curbside pickups and returns
- Perform deferred and preventive maintenance on exterior equipment, such as irrigation systems and lighting in parking areas, as necessary
- Set up temperature/health screenings on guests entering management-controlled entrances, as necessary
- Support tenants in setting up temperature/health screenings on guests entering stores, as necessary

Reopening the workplace

- Review inventory of cleaning and office supplies and order supplies as needed
- Identify areas that require heavy cleaning and disinfection prior to reopening
- Set ongoing cleaning and disinfection practices
- Clean and sanitize all appliances and surfaces in kitchens
- Increase space between employees:
 - Limit office occupancy
 - Stagger on site and remote schedules
 - Reconfigure cubicles
 - Convert from open, unassigned seating to assigned seating
 - Create one-way lanes
 - Mark floor with colored tape to designate personal workspaces
 - Install plexiglass barriers between workspaces
 - Convert semi-private and shared offices to private offices
 - Use small meeting rooms as private offices
- Determine if PPE (e.g., masks, gloves) will be required and who will provide it
- Restrict use of conference rooms or limit occupancy. Post signage and remove chairs to reinforce policy.
- Restrict visitor access to essential visits only. Identify single area for meeting all visitors and disinfect area after visit.
- Limit occupancy to:
 - Restrooms
 - Kitchen
 - Copier room
 - Mail room
 - Supply room
 - Other spaces as applicable
- Determine how to handle inbound and outbound mail and deliveries
- Restrict use of shared appliances (e.g., microwaves, coffee machines)
- Flush and disinfect all toilets and urinals prior to reopening
- Remove or restrict access to high-touch surfaces, such as copiers, screens, tablets, light switches, and doors
- Provide hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes near all remaining high-touch surfaces.
- Provide suggestions for commuting to and from work
- Encourage staff to bring their own coffee mugs, water bottles, and kitchenware to avoid sharing
- Establish business travel policies

Preparing for the next wave

Reopening of properties and businesses will occur during the pandemic, not after it, and the pandemic may continue for several more months. For this reason, you must be prepared for a possible next wave.

- Decide what changes forced by the pandemic will become permanent operating procedures
- Remain vigilant to identify and respond to recurrences of infection
- Check regularly for new health department guidance
- Incorporate lessons learned into your emergency preparedness and business continuity plan
- Build your capacity for remote work and operations

Resources and references

[ASHRAE COVID-19 Resources](#)

[Canada Health COVID-19 Resources](#)

[CBRE, AMO[®]—Reopening the World's Workplaces](#)

[CDC Resources for Businesses and Employers](#)

[Colliers International, AMO[®] COVID-19 Resources](#)

[Cushman and Wakefield, AMO[®]—Recovery Readiness: A How-To Guide for Reopening Your Workplace](#)

[Cushman and Wakefield Six Feet Office](#)

[Guidelines for Opening Up America](#)

[JLL COVID-19 Resources](#)

[OSHA Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#)

[Transwestern, AMO[®]—Back to the Workplace Readiness](#)