

Massachusetts' Safety Standards for Offices: What Businesses Need to Know

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On July 6, 2020, Massachusetts entered Phase 3 of its four-phased approach to reopening. The Administration also updated its [Sector Specific Workplace Specific Safety Standards for Office Spaces to Address COVID-19](#), which were originally released on May 18.

Employers are encouraged to have workers continue to work from home if feasible. With respect to social distancing in the office space, each office must monitor entry and exit points and limit occupancy to the greater of the following: (i) 50% of the building's maximum permitted occupancy; (ii) 10 persons (including staff) per 1,000 square feet of accessible spaces for buildings that have no permitted occupancy limitation on record; and (iii) in any case, no enclosed space within the facility may exceed 10 persons per 1,000 square feet. The occupancy calculations need to take into account customers, staff and other workers. This occupancy restriction may still be exceeded if the business can demonstrate a need for relief. Physical partitions separating workstations must be installed for areas that cannot be spaced out, and such partitions must be at least 6 feet in height. The hygiene protocols now specify that alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol should be made available at entrances and throughout the floor areas for workers.

The updated Safety Standards state that facilities must screen workers at each shift by ensuring that: (i) the worker is not experiencing any symptoms traditionally associated with COVID-19, such as fever (100.0 degrees and above) or chills, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, fatigue, headache, muscle or body aches, runny nose or congestion, loss of taste or smell, or nausea, vomiting or diarrhea; (ii) the worker has not had "close contact" with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19; and (iii) the worker has not been asked to self-isolate or quarantine by his or her doctor or a local public health official. "Close contact" means living in the same household as someone else who tested positive for COVID-19, caring for a COVID-19 positive person, being within 6 feet of a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 for 15 minutes or more, or coming in direct contact with secretions from a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 while that person was exhibiting symptoms. Any workers who fail to meet these benchmarks must be sent home. Workers must continue to wear face coverings when social distancing of 6 feet is impossible (unless the worker has a medical condition or disability). Also, businesses should be sure to maintain a log of workers and customers to support contact tracing efforts if necessary. If the employer is notified of a positive case at the workplace, it is required to notify the local Board of Health and assist as reasonably requested to advise likely contacts of the positive case to isolate and self-quarantine.

Offices should maintain operating hours that allow for on-going off-hour sanitation and cleaning. To increase airflow, windows and doors should be opened where possible. Further guidance for office spaces is available at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/safety-standards-and-checklist-office-spaces>.

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