

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. Certain break rooms must be closed in accordance with Section 7.4.8 of the [Department of Health's Safe Activities Regulations](#). If you want to discuss and explore possible solutions to your workplace's approach to break rooms, contact the Department of Business Regulation (DBR) at 401-889-5550 or use the questions form at [DBR.ri.gov](#).

Employee schedules and interactions

- **Consider closing common areas if possible. If not, instruct employees to avoid eating in or otherwise using these areas when possible.**
- Encourage employees to eat meals or take breaks outdoors as weather permits or in their own workspaces as is practical.
 - Employers may consider creating outdoor break stations for employees.
 - Employers may encourage employees to take a break in their personal cars as is practical.
- Limit the number of people allowed in common areas at the same time based on the size of the space and six-foot social distancing requirements. For example, for a smaller space, permit no more than one or two people in a break room at a time.
 - Post signage with capacity limits outside of the break room.
- 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](#).
- Rearrange furniture, remove furniture, and/or mark spaces in common areas to ensure that people stay at least six feet apart from each other.
- Discourage employees from eating food together or sharing food with each other.
- Consider staggering break and lunch times to reduce the number of employees in the break room or cafeteria at the same time and their exposure to COVID-19.
 - Remind employees to arrive to their breaks on time, not early or late.
- Where food and other items are stored in shared spaces, like refrigerators and cabinets, post signs about physical distancing requirements to reduce congregation.
- Avoid in-person office celebrations within common areas and in general.
- Turn off, cover, or block water fountains in employee common areas, except for touchless water bottle refill stations, to prevent employee use.
- 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.
 - 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.

REOPENING RI

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 (e.g. a surgical mask) 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.
- 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](#).
- Disinfect shared equipment and high-touch surfaces, like refrigerators and microwaves, between use.
- Ensure that common areas used by employees are [cleaned](#) multiple times a day. Consider posting a cleaning schedule for all employees to see.
- Provide sanitization supplies, like wipes for tables and hand sanitizer, for employees to use whenever they enter common areas.
- Provide cleaning materials for employees to clean the space they used once they are finished.