

Office Design Considerations in a Post COVID-19 World

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UNDERSTAND THE ISSUE

As we are looking to restart the economy in an active COVID-19 state, there may be a sense of urgency on the need to redesign existing office space to meet the challenges of maintaining an effective and productive work environment.

There are many articles expressing wholesale floor plan modifications to office space as an approach to help prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus. Some of these design strategies include adding uni-directional circulation corridors, modifying or eliminating reception areas and conference rooms, reconfiguring cafeteria seating, and even retrofitting or replacing office desks and cubicles to include translucent barriers as a means of separation. With the novel coronavirus still in its infancy and without a complete understanding of how the virus is transmitted, it is highly probable that a reactive wholesale renovation design effort of existing office space is premature and could be a very costly mistake.

At DPS Group we have begun the process of adding practical solutions for maintaining the safety of our people. We are sharing the same advice with our clients who have begun to reach out to us regarding updating their office facilities as they embark on plans to bring employees back to the office.

BEGIN WITH THE BASICS

Current strategies to reduce the spread of COVID-19 are quite basic and are now widely accepted in the workplace environment today. Strategies include:

- The use of face coverings.
- The encouragement of increased handwashing.
- The strategic placement of hand sanitizer stations.
- The implementation of an office disinfection policy.
- Limiting the number of employees within the office setting.
- Utilizing virtual technology for meetings and other business needs.

These simple and inexpensive upgrades can be quickly implemented to further reduce the transmission of the COVID-19 virus and enhance employee safety.

Building upon these defenses with simple office upgrades that include adding motion sensor operation, hands-free technology, and virtual communication to promote social distancing is the first step in office renovation strategies that should be considered before any expansive renovation projects are undertaken.





MAKE SMART DECISIONS

Adding smart renovations that embrace a hands-free environment and encompass the latest motion-sensing technology and running virtual meetings are a great first step. These types of alterations do not require any major changes to existing office layouts or building services infrastructure and can be completed quickly and are relatively inexpensive. Some other ideas include:

- Installing hands-free faucets, soap, and paper towel dispensers, in office kitchens, cafeterias, and canteens.
- Changing out switch activation lighting to motion sensor light controls.
- Retrofit existing conference rooms with the latest technology to support virtual and video conferencing.
- Upgrading manual doors with automatic operation control with motion sensors or proximity fob activators.

These inexpensive renovation strategies can reduce the majority of human interaction and daily operation of basic functions performed within the office setting. Virtual conferencing will promote social distancing yet still provide the interaction needed to meet business needs. By introducing these new design strategy approaches into the office environment, the transmission of COVID-19 will potentially slow and reduce the risk of infection through common interaction.

Considering the size and layouts of standard office cubicles, social distancing guidelines regarding 6-foot separation distances should primarily be met, however, may require slight repositioning or adjustments to ensure compliance with suggested distancing limits.

CAN WE FORECAST THE FUTURE?

To protect employees returning to the office, it's imperative to stay on top of the ever-evolving information regarding the transmission of the novel coronavirus, until of course, there is a vaccine for it.

What we know today is that the basic strategies of social distancing, disinfecting surfaces, and wearing face masks have been universally accepted as the first line of defense in slowing the transmission of the virus. Building upon these defenses with simple office upgrades that include adding motion sensor operation, hands-free technology, and virtual communication to promote social distancing is the first step in office renovation strategies that should be considered before any expansive renovation projects are undertaken.

As more discoveries are made about the COVID-19 virus and its transmission information may be revealed that there are better design approaches for office environment safety and reduced transmission risk. Until that time is realized, it is better to proceed with caution and limit costly and potentially unnecessary major office renovations.