



Interim General Guidance for Businesses and Organizations (December 8, 2020)

Guidelines for Conducting Business: Any scenario in which many people gather together poses a risk for COVID-19 transmission. All businesses and organizations where groups of people gather in an enclosed space should create and implement a plan to minimize the opportunity for COVID-19 transmission at their facility. The general guidance below will help businesses and organizations reduce the spread of COVID-19 in their communities. Specific [guidance for retail and other public facing businesses](#) can be found on the NC DHHS COVID-19 response site.

In addition to the requirements below, certain businesses **must follow** Closure Periods or Stay at Home Orders, when they are in effect. For more information on any requirements that are currently in effect and how this applies to your business, please visit [Business Closure Periods and Stay at Home Restrictions](#).

This guidance covers the following topics:

- Social Distancing and Minimizing Exposure
- Cloth Face Coverings
- Cleaning and Hygiene
- Monitoring for Symptoms
- Protecting Vulnerable Populations
- Combatting Misinformation
- Water and Ventilation Systems
- Additional Resources

Social Distancing and Minimizing Exposure

[Social distancing](#) is one of the only tools we have to decrease the spread of COVID-19. Social distancing (“physical distancing”) means keeping space between yourself and other people outside of your home. Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms’ length) from other people; do not gather in groups; stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings. Phase 2 includes several requirements and recommendations to support social distancing in spaces where the public may gather.

It is recommended that businesses and organizations:

- Limit in-person meetings to no more than current mass gathering limits
- Allow staff to work remotely as much as possible.
- Stagger shifts when remote working is not possible.

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- Post signage around the office reminding staff about social distancing (staying at least 6 feet away from others). [Know Your Ws](#) sign templates are available in English and Spanish on the NC DHHS COVID-19 response site.
 - Consider posting signs around frequently touched objects like shared printers or bathroom sinks.
- Move desks and workstations at least six (6) feet apart.
- Mark six (6) feet of spacing on the floor in higher traffic areas, such as reception areas.
- Consider closing off areas where people are more likely to gather, like breakrooms.
- Clearly mark designated entry and exit points; if a building has only one entry/exit point, try to stagger entry and exit times if possible.
- Develop and use systems that allow for online, email, or telephone transactions.
- Provide or encourage staff to bring their own water or individual meals, to reduce possible exposure.

Cloth Face Coverings

It is required that all individuals wear a cloth face covering. An FAQ about face coverings is available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

- It is encouraged that businesses and organizations provide cloth face coverings for employees and customers. If provided, they must be single use or properly laundered using hot water and a high heat dryer between uses.
- Please share guidance to employees on use, wearing, and removal of cloth face coverings, such as [CDC's guidance on wearing and removing cloth face masks](#), [CDC's use of cloth face coverings](#), and [CDC's cloth face coverings FAQ's](#).

Cleaning and Hygiene

Washing hands with soap for 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer reduces the spread of transmission.

It is recommended that businesses and organizations:

- Perform ongoing and routine environmental cleaning and disinfection of high-touch areas (e.g., doors, doorknobs, rails, tables, chairs) with an [EPA approved disinfectant for SARS-CoV-2](#) (the virus that causes COVID-19), and increase disinfection during times when the business may have more visitors.
- Promote frequent use of hand washing and hand sanitizer for staff and individuals. Require handwashing of staff immediately upon reporting to work, after contact with individuals, after performing cleaning and disinfecting activities, and frequently throughout the day.
- Provide, whenever available, hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol) at the entrance and other areas. Systematically and frequently check and refill hand sanitizers and assure soap and hand drying materials are available at all sinks.
- Provide tissues for proper cough and sneeze hygiene.
- Increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, or other methods. Do not open windows and doors if they pose a safety risk.

Monitoring for Symptoms

Conducting regular screening for symptoms can help reduce exposure. Staff should be encouraged to self-monitor for symptoms such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath.

If they develop symptoms, they should notify their supervisor and return home. More information on [how to monitor for symptoms](#) is available from the CDC.

It is recommended that businesses and organizations:

- Employees who have symptoms when they arrive at work or become sick during the day should immediately be separated from other employees, customers, and visitors and sent home.
- Conduct daily [symptom](#) screening (use this standard interview questionnaire) ([English](#) | [Spanish](#)) of employees at entrance to workplace with immediately sending symptomatic workers home to [isolate](#).
- Post signage at the main entrance requesting that people who have been symptomatic with fever and/or cough not enter, such as [Know Your Ws/Stop if You Have Symptoms](#) flyers (English - [Color, Black & White](#); Spanish - [Color, Black & White](#)).
- Have a plan in place for immediately removing employee from work if symptoms develop.
- Establish and enforce sick leave policies to prevent the spread of disease, including:
 - Enforcing employees staying home if sick.
 - Encouraging liberal use of sick leave policy.
 - Expanding paid leave policies to allow employees to stay home when sick.
- Per CDC guidelines, if an employee has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or is presumed positive by a medical professional due to symptoms, the employee should be excluded from work until:
 - No fever for at least 24 hours since recovery (without the use of fever-reducing medicine) AND
 - Other symptoms have improved (e.g., coughing, shortness of breath) AND
 - At least 10 days have passed since first symptoms

***A test-based strategy is no longer recommended to discontinue isolation or precautions and employers should not require documentation of a negative test before allowing a worker to return.**

- [Per CDC guidelines](#), if an employee has been diagnosed with COVID-19 but does not have symptoms, they should remain out of work until 10 days have passed since the date of their first positive COVID-19 diagnostic test, assuming they have not subsequently developed symptoms since their positive test.
- Require symptomatic employees to wear masks until leaving the office. Cleaning and disinfecting procedure should be implemented by designated personnel following [CDC guidelines](#) once sick employee leaves.
- Provide employees with information on help lines to access information or other support in reference to COVID-19, e.g. 211 and Hope4NC Helpline (1-855-587-3463).

Protecting Vulnerable Populations

Information on who is at higher risk for severe disease is available from the [CDC](#) and [NCDHHS](#).

It is recommended that businesses and organizations:

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- Enable employees to self-identify as high risk for severe disease and reassign work to minimize face-to-face contact and to allow them to maintain a distance of six feet from others, or to telework if possible.
- If your office has frequent outside visitors, consider designating a specific time for those at higher risk to come into the office without the general population (such as early morning, or late afternoon).

Combatting Misinformation

Help make sure that the information your employees is getting is coming directly from reliable resources. Use resources from a trusted source like the [CDC](#) or [NCDHHS](#) to promote behaviors that prevent the spread of COVID-19.

It is recommended that businesses and organizations:

- Provide workers with education about COVID-19 strategies, using methods like videos, webinars, or FAQs. Some reliable sources include [NC DHHS COVID-19](#), [Know Your W's: Wear, Wait, Wash](#), [NC DHHS COVID-19 Latest Updates](#), [NC DHHS COVID-19 Materials & Resources](#)
- Promote informational helplines like 211 and Hope4NC and other [Wellness Resources](#).
- Put up signs and posters, such as those found [Know Your W's: Wear, Wait, Wash](#) and those found [Social Media Toolkit for COVID-19](#).

Water and Ventilation Systems

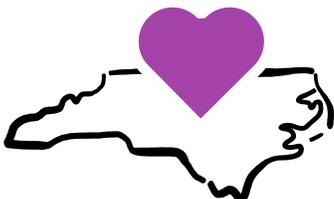
Reduced use of water and ventilation systems can pose their own health hazards. There is increased risk for Legionella and other waterborne pathogens from stagnant or standing water.

Before reopening, it is recommended that businesses and organizations:

- Follow the CDC's [Guidance](#) for Reopening Buildings After Prolonged Shutdown or Reduced Operation to minimize the risk of diseases associated with water.
- Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, or other methods. Do not open windows and doors if they pose a safety or health risk to people using the facility.

Additional Resources

- NC DHHS: [North Carolina COVID-19](#)
- CDC: [Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#)
- CDC: [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#)
- CDC: [Reopening Guidance](#)
- EPA: [Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2](#)
- FDA: [Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- HHS/OSHA: [Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#)
- DHS: [Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce](#)



#StayStrongNC

**Staying apart brings us together.
Protect your family and neighbors.**

Learn more at nc.gov/covid19.



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