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Commercial Real Estate Strategy  
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**POST  
COVID-19  
PERSPECTIVE**



## COVID-19 How to Avoid an Outbreak Returning to Work

### Rethinking and Returning to the Office

We all know that everyone isn't as hygienic at work as they should be. So at Real Strategy Advisors, we thought we'd share some health and safety ideas as the world discusses heading back to work. Priorities have been focused on ensuring physical distancing and employee health and safety while also trying to maintain engagement and productivity through virtual tools while people are forced to work from home. Moving forward however, senior leaders will be looking towards re-occupying their workplaces in a post-pandemic transition.

### Phased Approach

Real Strategy Advisors believes an opportunity exists to re-think what such an office is and can be. In our "COVID-19 How to Avoid an Outbreak Returning to Work" series, Real Strategy Advisors will be exploring the importance of standardized safety and hygiene regimens at the office, as well as providing important suggestions surrounding functional and operational conditions that must be met. We are recommending a phased approach to re-occupancy which generally entails the following:

- Limiting the initial capacity of employees allowed in the office, on each floor, etc.
- Having assigned in-office shifts (e.g. for relevant teams) and alternate work hours
- Adjusting office practices as social distancing regulation and measures ease

The importance here is controlling and minimizing physical contact points where viral transmissions may occur. An example might be to allocate employees more personal assigned space when physically in-office, thus reducing overall population density. There will also be a requirement for cleaning during or between shift changes. We will explore this concept further in future posts on health and safety.

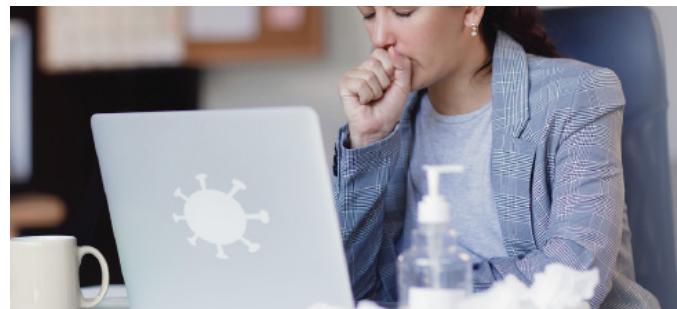
### Remote Work

As leaders, whether we embraced it or not, remote work has been forced on us like never before. Once a return to the workplace begins, we expect people will still be working from home in larger numbers than ever, and leaders need to prepare. Real Strategy Advisors expects to be re-evaluating benchmarks and metrics used with clients to calculate how much office space their organization requires and the tools their employees leverage on a daily basis to complete their tasks.

Operating in a work-from-home manner can result in more efficiency but also comes with IT challenges surrounding sustaining a larger digital infrastructure. Workflows and communication also need to be optimized so that employees can still engage and connect. Proper home-office setups for all employees are a must!

### Clear Communication

Communication and leadership will be key to instilling the needed practices to achieve a safe workplace. If your team doesn't know that steps are being taken to protect



#### Workplace Strategy: COVID-19

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them, then they might have second thoughts about returning to the office. Transparency and honesty are also integral. Building the essential trust needed amongst employees should be a key concern from an office culture perspective.

Avoid impulsive and reactionary decisions by discussing them with all relevant parties and stakeholders. Keep a cool head during this transition period and practice sound decision making to ensure a safe shift. Please call Real Strategy Advisors for in-depth advice on best practices surrounding a safe return to the workplace — we're here to help!



## Workplace Hygiene, Safety Routines and Setups

We all know that everyone isn't as hygienic at work as they should be. So at Real Strategy Advisors, we thought we'd share some health and safety ideas as the world discusses heading back to work. We recently introduced the concept of a phased approach towards office re-occupancy in our earlier post. Limiting the capacity of people, using team-based shifts to control population flow, and allowing for physical distancing in the office, will all help contribute to a safer return.

In this second piece of our "COVID-19 How to Avoid an Outbreak Returning to Work" series, we'll be investigating the safety and hygiene aspects of workplaces in more detail. We'll cover protocols that should be considered with reference to personal and shared office spaces. Though we might all want to go back to work as though nothing is different, we should all embrace this chance to change our workspaces for the positive and make them as safe as possible for each other.

## Standardized Protocols

Cautious leaders should be looking at all avenues to control the number and flow of people into the workplace (employee or otherwise) as part of a phased re-entry. Having staggered work times and days with scheduled or lengthened break times are simple considerations in this respect. Distributing employee screening systems (e.g. Infrared Fever Scan Systems or IFss), gloves, and masks will also become more commonplace in the months to come.

Make sure you order health and safety supplies well before your planned return date to ensure you receive them in time!

Daytime cleaning efforts should be increased both to mitigate risk and maintain a level of visibility so people don't have to worry when and whether it's occurring. This may be a supplemental service over and above what's offered by your property manager. Another simple change to reduce transmission is to ensure the person tasked with garbage collection and disposal can do so in a safe manner.

Apart from basic but practical changes, some areas for improvement and investment would be:

- No-touch toilets and sinks
- Sanitization of door handles
- Hand sanitizer and disinfectant supplies
- Electro-static cleaning options



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## Guest Screening

Access to your workplace might need to be controlled more rigorously. You should be thinking about what type of screening procedures might need to be in place to avoid any risk in this respect. Depending on the frequency of clients and visitors to your office, you may want to consider assigning an employee to handle greetings and screenings. Contact your local health authorities to develop screening questions and have a supply of hand sanitizer/masks for your guests. Depending on how guests answer your questions regarding their potential exposure, different steps might be required.

## Personal Spaces

The office floor plan may also need to be adapted to allow for increased physical distancing. Temporary dividing panels may be required and furniture re-configured to avoid staff sitting face-to-face, are other changes that might be implemented prior to their return. People should be encouraged to use and be provided with personal protective equipment (PPE). Clean desk policies will also be necessary as the removal of extra items on a desk space will allow cleaning crews to do their jobs more thoroughly — ensuring the entirety of the space is safe.

## Shared Spaces

In the larger, common spaces of the office, such as hallways, kitchens, and meeting spaces, there are other measures that will need to be taken to decrease the chances of viral spread. Swap out couches for more individualized chair options that can be spaced apart. For the time being, reduce the extra seating and chairs from collaboration areas/conference rooms. For kitchens and eating areas, make sure these spaces are used only on a necessary basis, if at all.

All shared areas must be thoroughly wiped down and sanitized after each use as recommended by local health authorities. Temporarily remove any magazines, table decorations, or other items that might normally be on display. Decide who will have access to and distribute supplies like pens and paper. Talk to your IT department and suppliers about business equipment such as printers/copiers to discuss touchless options. This may be the perfect time to reduce or eliminate paper within your organization and make the transition to digital.

## Making the Adjustment

Some of the considerations and changes here are fairly easy to implement. Others may require some investment and adjustment. That said, they all require advanced discussion and planning to ensure we will all benefit from a safe work environment. Though we are not health professionals, if you have questions about preparing your office space for an optimal return, contact Real Strategy Advisors today!



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## About the author:

*Darren has been an industry leader in the commercial real estate sector for over 20 years providing expertise in the areas of workplace strategy and commercial real estate brokerage. Darren has worked with some of Ottawa's most active commercial design builders and major commercial real estate brokerages. With exceptional consulting and business strategy skills, he is an experienced leader and provides C-Suite level advice to his clients.*