

Deciding When to Reopen Your Law Office

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A widespread return to offices probably will not occur until the September 2021 when enough people have been vaccinated to achieve herd immunity. Meantime, following is a list of things to consider when selecting a date for reopening your office. Following the list are additional resources for office reopening.

Checklist - Assess your firm's readiness for reopening by reviewing CDC guidelines for employers. Create a checklist for cleaning methods, hazard assessment, symptom screening, sick employees, social distancing, travel restrictions, and workplace policy,

Codes - Check local codes, state laws, and federal regulations on reopening. Stay informed and be flexible.

Communications - Keep clients, lawyers, and staff involved in planning and implementation with a constant flow of emails and memos.

Collaboration - Returning to the workplace improves collaboration, supports development of new employees, and nurtures firm culture. Until the return is completed, continue virtual team building with online staff meetings, e-alerts, and e-newsletters.

Compassion - Be compassionate when deciding and when and how to reopen your office. There are a variety of factors that affect staff, including childcare, health conditions, and personal situations. Provide reasonable accommodation to those who need to continue working remotely or have limitations on their work schedules.

Procedures - Adopt procedures for an organized and safe return to the office. Include controls on the way people work, monitoring their health, and notifying others of illness. Also cover phases of reopening, reservation of workspace, sign-ins, temperature checks, and vaccination requirements. Offer house calls and virtual counseling to clients who are unable to visit your office.

Precautions - Contact building managers and landlords to assess readiness for reopening, including administrative controls, cleaning protocols, and ventilation systems. Undertake office re-arrangements to reduce risks by increasing distance between workstations and reducing seating in reception areas and conference rooms. Install lockers for personal belongings to promote hoteling and day-use of works space.

Supplies - Purchase supplies to keep your office safe, including disinfectant sprays, face masks, hand sanitizers, safety posters, surface cleaners, and waste management materials.

Timing - Balance the needs of the clients, employees, and the firm. Start by adopting plans for reducing density, limiting attendance, and establishing safety precautions. Also plan for long term changes like continuation of remote working and reduction of leased space.

Conclusion. Shifts in the Coronavirus situation have caused firms to consider the timing for reopening. Selecting a reopening date requires advance planning to accommodate the needs of clients, lawyers, and staff. For a successful reopening, adopt a plan that promotes a spirit of cooperation, collaboration, and flexibility. Review the resources mentioned below to help your firm thrive in this challenging environment.

Resources for Office Reopening

Articles

Danielle Braff, "[Thanks To The COVID-19 Pandemic, Law Firms Are Starting To Embrace Virtual Offices—but will it last?](#)", ABA Journal, Feb. 1, 2021.

Erin Caron, "[Considerations Before Reopening Your Office](#)", AICPA, 2020.

AmTrust Financial, "[Covid-19: How to Reopen the Office](#)".

Three Sixty Marketing, "[How to Decide When It's Time to Reopen Your Business](#)", May 6, 2020.

Meara Hamidianai, "[When Will Offices Reopen?: Employee Requirement for a Return to Work](#)", PayClic, Nov. 20, 2020).

Ryan Ori, "[Will COVID-19 Vaccines Accelerate a Return to the Office](#)", Chicago Tribune, Jan. 4, 2021

William Scarbrough, "[Operational Checklist for Reopening Your Law Firm](#)", Thomson Reuters, May 18, 2020.

Staci Zaretsky, "[Biglaw Back to Work: Get Read for Office Life Come Spring](#)", Above the Law, Jan 13, 2021.

Staci Zaretsky, "[Top Biglaw Firm Sets Its Sights on a September 2021 Office Reopening](#)", Above the Law, Mar. 3, 2021.

Forms

[Sample Signs](#) (Vista Print)

[Workplace Policy](#) (Harvard University)

[Telecommuting Policy](#) (Texas Society of Association Executives)

State-by-State Restrictions

[New York Times](#)

[The Points Guy](#)

Surveys

[How the Coronavirus Outbreak Has and Hasn't Changed the Way Americans Work](#), Pew Research Center, Dec. 9, 2020.

[Future of the Office](#), CBRE, Sept. 2020

[Office Occupancy Surveys](#), Marcus & Millichap

[Remote Work Survey](#), PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Jan 12, 2021.

[Reopening Survey](#), The Conference Board, Oct. 8, 2020.

Websites

[American Bar Association](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

[Cushman & Wakefield](#)

[McKinsey and Company](#)

[Society for Human Resource Management](#)

[US Chamber of Commerce.](#)