



State of Vermont Return to Worksite Guidance

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Introduction

This document is intended to provide a general framework and additional resources for worksite re-entry protocols. They are intended to support and sustain State of Vermont (SOV) government operations throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. If the operational demands of agencies and departments require employees to return to the worksite in an office or field setting, two guiding principles will be used to help prevent worksite exposure to COVID-19:

1. Maintain Healthy Government Operations
2. Maintain a Healthy Work Environment to Prevent and Reduce Transmission Among Employees

Any necessary return to office and/or field work will be done in a phased approach. Epidemiological data may evolve and necessitate new guidance. Agencies and Departments shall frequently refer to the [COVID-19 Recovery Resource Center](#), available through the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD), for current mandatory health and safety requirements.

“As we move forward, businesses and employees must understand that how they work is essential to resuming and maintaining business operations. Preventing outbreaks and limiting the spread of COVID-19 is the only way to avoid future business and social disruption.” - ACCD

Please note the following guidance may differ for 24/7 operations including correctional facilities, the Vermont Veterans’ Home, Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital, and State-run youth programs. Employees within such operations should continue to follow the guidance issued by their Department.

I. Maintaining Healthy Government Operations

1. Training

The Vermont Occupational Safety and Health Agency (VOSHA), in conjunction with the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) and the ACCD, has developed training on appropriate safety measures necessary to return to work amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The training can be accessed on [SOV LINC](#) – the State’s Learning Management System. All State employees must complete and document this mandatory training prior to returning to the worksite, see [DHR memo](#).

2. Reopening

There are three main tenets to keep in mind if Vermont State Employees must return to the worksite to meet operational needs:

- **Safety First:** Follow all guidance from the [VDH](#) and [VOSHA](#).

- **Maximize Telework:** State Government operations shall encourage and facilitate telework for those employees who have the capacity to work remotely when practical and without impeding productivity.
- **Personal Responsibility:** We are all in this together, and everyone plays a role by following the [VDH](#) and [VOSHA](#) guidelines.

Any State Government entity that has employees in their worksite during the state of emergency must complete and keep a safety and training plan on file. This plan must provide for operation in a low density and low contact environment. The plan must:

- Be specific to your worksite (office, field, client-service, retail, etc.);
- Identify all areas and job tasks with potential exposure to COVID-19; and,
- Identify how you will adhere to these requirements at your worksite.

If operational needs require increased on-site operations, Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS) must be notified.

3. Health Officer Requirement

To ensure compliance with the Governor's Executive Order 01-20 (EO), all operations shall designate an on-site Health Officer for every shift.

The role of the Health Officer is to:

- understand signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and how the virus is spread;
- educate workforce on current COVID-19 health and safety protocols;
- monitor compliance with mandatory health and safety requirements in worksite;
- have the authority to stop or modify activities to ensure work conforms with the mandatory health and safety requirements;
- advise on immediate actions if staff become exposed to the virus; and,
- consult with department/agency leadership on measures needed to stop or modify activities.

4. Determining Who Returns to the Worksite

While government entities shall encourage and facilitate telework for employees with the capacity to work remotely without impeding productivity, operational demands may require some employees to return to the worksite.

Appointing authorities and supervisors who receive requests from employees who have not been required to return to the worksite for operational reasons shall consider those requests on a case by case basis using criteria set forth by the [Department of Human Resources \(DHR\)](#).

If an Agency/Department should need assistance in determining who should return to the worksite, please contact your HR [Business Partner](#).

Determine how you will operate if absenteeism spikes

Review your COOP plan to maintain essential functions, should there be an increase in the number of sick employees, those who stay home to care for sick family members, and those who must stay home to watch their children due to COVID-19 related closures in [childcare programs and K-12 schools](#).

Assess your essential functions

Be prepared to change your business practices, if needed, to maintain critical operations (e.g., identify alternative suppliers, prioritize existing customers, or temporarily suspend some of your operations).

II. Maintaining Healthy Working Environments

We must all do our part to protect our personal health and safety, as well as the health and safety of others, both at work and outside of work.

VOSHA's [Whistleblower Protection Program](#) protects Vermont employees who raise concerns about safety and/or health at their workplace or participate in other endeavors in the furtherance of occupational safety and health and suffer retaliation as a result. All State employees are encouraged to report any concerns regarding health and safety in State facilities.

1. Pre-entry Screening Guidance

[Health screening](#) shall be implemented for all employees prior to the commencement of each work shift. Please refer to the [ACCD COVID-19](#) and [BGS COVID-19](#) websites for the most current health screening requirements.

2. Staying Safe at Work—Personal Safety

Hand Washing

Handwashing or hand sanitization is required before entering and leaving the worksite and encouraged throughout the workday. Employees must have easy access to soap and water or hand sanitizer during work hours.

Mask Requirements

As of Saturday, August 1, 2020, Vermonters shall wear masks or cloth facial coverings over their nose and mouth any time they are in public spaces, indoors or outdoors, where they come in contact with others from outside their households, especially in congregate settings, and where it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least six feet. A nonmedical face mask or cloth face covering over the nose and mouth **must** be worn by all employees in the worksite while in the presence of others.

Exceptions for Masks/Face coverings

If you have an employee work assignment where a mask may be considered a safety issue, you will need to develop an alternative solution prior to returning the employee to the worksite. If there are concerns, please contact your [HR Business Partner](#).

Physical Distancing

Physical distancing is a simple and very effective mitigation strategy to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus and is a central part of the State Facility Reentry Policy. To help promote physical distancing, agencies and departments should:

- Use remote work when practical without impeding productivity;
- Limit staff travel between multiple sites;
- Require employees to observe strict physical distancing of 6 feet while on location to the extent possible;
- Ensure customers observe strict physical distancing of 6 feet while on location, to the extent possible;
- Discourage the use of shared workspaces, desks, offices, etc. to the maximum extent practicable;
- Limit face-to-face staff meetings and observe physical distancing when face-to-face meetings are necessary;
- Consider staggered work shifts, break times, etc., and expanding hours to reduce the number of individuals working together and to reduce contact with members of the public;
- Limit the occupancy of designated common areas, such as break rooms and cafeterias, so that occupants maintain strict physical distancing of no less than 6 feet per individual.
- Strictly enforce the occupancy limit of designated common areas and require employees to wipe down the area after use; and,
- Refer to [Space Strategies and Work Controls for Maintaining Physical Distancing](#) for additional guidance on how best to achieve physical distancing in the worksite.

Physical distancing should be practiced in all locations including, but not limited to, open office areas, cafeterias, common areas, conference spaces, entrance/exit areas of work sites, stairwells, elevators, public-facing client service areas and private work areas, including offices and internal support spaces.

Noncompliance with Personal Safety Guidelines

If an employee refuses to comply with the guidelines, supervisors should contact their HR Business Partner and meet with the employee to discuss their concerns. Employees who do not comply with the guidelines outlined herein, may be subject to appropriate disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

3. Worksite Signage

To help maintain employee mindfulness about proper COVID-19 safety precautions, BGS is providing worksite poster templates on the [BGS COVID Site](#) and suggested posted locations. Supervisors and the on-site Health Officer should print and post these posters in applicable facility locations.

4. Worksite Visitors

Access to worksites will be limited to visitors who have a legitimate need to be there.

Non-essential visitors such as family members and friends shall be prohibited from entering the worksite unless authorized by the appropriate appointing authority or designee. Meetings and business should continue to take place virtually as much as possible to ensure risk reduction. If critical in-person visits or business must occur, they should be scheduled in advance by appointment where feasible and must follow the physical distancing guidance provided in this guide.

- All visitors and employees are required to wear a mask when in the presence of others.
- Businesses and non-profit and government entities may decline service to individuals who are not wearing a mask.
- All visitors will be self-screened upon entering a State facility.
- For the latest mandatory COVID-19 health and safety requirements for visitors entering the work site, please refer to the most current [ACCD guidance](#).
- Disposable cloth masks must be available at the worksite for visitors.

5. Cleaning

All common spaces and equipment, including bathrooms, frequently touched surfaces and doors, tools and equipment and vehicles must be cleaned regularly and, when possible, prior to transfer from one person to another.

BGS has developed and implemented a [protocol](#) for disinfecting high touch surfaces in common areas of state facilities. Routine cleaning of personal workspaces and disinfection of shared workspaces, tools, and equipment is the responsibility of the Agencies and Departments.

Agencies and Departments are required to provide cleaning supplies and disinfectants to their employees.

Employees are advised to wear gloves appropriate for the chemicals being used when they are cleaning and disinfecting. Additional PPE may be needed based on the setting and product.

III. Responding to a Worksite Exposure

If an employee(s) is exposed to another employee or a member of the public known to be infected with COVID-19 while performing his/her work duties, he/she must immediately notify his/her supervisor. The employee shall be sent home if they are in the worksite and directed to follow guidance from VDH. The supervisor is required to file a "First Report of Injury Report" claim in accordance with applicable Workers' Compensation statutes and AOA Office of Workers' Compensation procedures. Until further notice is provided, all employees filing Workers' Compensation claims, except for those requiring immediate and urgent medical intervention, shall follow the telemedicine process.

In most cases, facilities do not need to be shut down. If it has been less than 7 days since the sick employee has been in the facility, close off any areas used for prolonged periods of time by the sick person and contact your DHR and BGS representative.

Supervisors should not initiate any discussion with other staff about a colleague in the office testing positive and should not initiate contact tracing. The VDH Contact Tracing team will do that work and may reach out to the supervisor.

IV. Resources

Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Resources for You and Your Family

As we all work hard to continue serving Vermonters during this challenging time, it is also important to focus on our own well-being.

EAP is free and available to you, members of your family and anyone living in your household with a variety of services, year-round. EAP services can help with everything from having trouble sleeping or stress, to financial, legal, work or relationship concerns, and more.

EAP also offers you the option of HIPAA-compliant tele-counseling, where you can talk with, and see, a counselor from the privacy and comfort of your own home. Counselors are available 24/7. Call EAP and learn more at 1-866-660-9533.

There are also a variety of mindfulness tools and resources available that can help you to better cope with stress and feelings of uncertainty. Visit www.investeap.org (password: vteap) for more information.

Other Resource Links

Find helpful information regarding safety measures, current guidance, etc.

- [VDH COVID-19 Page](#)
- Vermont Governor Phil Scott's [orders and response to COVID 19](#)
- [ACCD COVID-19 Resources and Recovery Site](#)
- [DHR COVID-19 Resource Page](#)
- [BGS COVID-19 Page](#)
- [DOL VOSHA](#)