



COVID-19 INDUSTRY GUIDANCE: Real Estate Transactions

May 7, 2020

covid19.ca.gov



OVERVIEW

On March 19, 2020, the State Public Health Officer and Director of the California Department of Public Health issued an order requiring most Californians to stay at home to disrupt the spread of COVID-19 among the population.

The impact of COVID-19 on the health of Californians is not yet fully known. Reported illness ranges from very mild (some people have no symptoms) to severe illness that may result in death. Certain groups, including people aged 65 or older and those with serious underlying medical conditions, such as heart or lung disease or diabetes, are at higher risk of hospitalization and serious complications. Transmission is most likely when people are in close contact with an infected person, even if that person does not have any symptoms or has not yet developed symptoms.

Precise information about the number and rates of COVID-19 by industry or occupational groups, including among critical infrastructure workers, is not available at this time. There have been multiple outbreaks in a range of workplaces, indicating that workers are at risk of acquiring or transmitting COVID-19 infection. Examples of these workplaces include long-term care facilities, prisons, food production, warehouses, meat processing plants, and grocery stores.

As stay-at-home orders are modified, it is essential that all possible steps be taken to ensure the safety of workers and the public.

Key prevention practices include:

- ✓ physical distancing to the maximum extent possible,
- ✓ use of face coverings by employees (where respiratory protection is not required) and customers/clients,
- ✓ frequent handwashing and regular cleaning and disinfection,
- ✓ training employees on these and other elements of the COVID-19 prevention plan.

In addition, it will be critical to have in place appropriate processes to identify new cases of illness in workplaces and, when they are identified, to intervene quickly and work with public health authorities to halt the spread of the virus.

Purpose

This document provides guidance for businesses operating in the real estate industry including sales and rentals of single-family, multi-family, apartment, commercial, and industrial properties to support a safe, clean environment for workers. The guidance is not intended to revoke or repeal any employee rights, either statutory, regulatory or collectively bargained, and is not exhaustive, as it does not include county health orders, nor is it a substitute for any existing safety and health-related regulatory requirements such as those of Cal/OSHA.¹ Stay current on changes to public health guidance and state/local orders, as the COVID-19 situation continues. Cal/OSHA has more comprehensive guidance on their [Cal/OSHA Interim General Guidelines on](#)

[Protecting Workers from COVID-19 webpage](#). CDC has additional requirements in their [guidance](#) for businesses and employers.



Workplace Specific Plan

- Establish a written, worksite-specific COVID-19 prevention plan at every facility, perform a comprehensive risk assessment of all work areas, and designate a person at each facility to implement the plan.
- Identify contact information for the local health department where the facility is located for communicating information about COVID-19 outbreaks among employees.
- Train and communicate with employees and employee representatives on the plan.
- Regularly evaluate the workplace for compliance with the plan and document and correct deficiencies identified.
- Investigate any COVID-19 illness and determine if any work-related factors could have contributed to risk of infection. Update the plan as needed to prevent further cases.
- Identify close contacts (within six feet for 10 minutes or more) of an infected employee and take steps to isolate COVID-19 positive employee(s) and close contacts.
- Adhere to the guidelines below. Failure to do so could result in workplace illnesses that may cause operations to be temporarily closed or limited.



Shown Properties Specific Plan

- Establish a written COVID-19 prevention plan to be followed by agents who show properties. Display a set of rules for agents and home viewers at the entrance of the property that are to be a condition of entry. The rules must include instructions to use face coverings and hand sanitizer. It must include instructions to maintain physical distancing and avoid touching surfaces of the shown property. The rules or a link to the rules should be part of online public and MLS listings. Posted rules should be clearly visible and include pictograms.
- Real estate and rental agents must confirm understanding of the rules with visitors before showing the property and provide a digital copy of the COVID-19 prevention plan to clients, appraisers, inspectors, stagers,

purchasing agents and contractors and obtain their agreement to follow the plan prior to entering the property.

- Regularly evaluate compliance with the plan and document and correct deficiencies identified.



Topics for Employee Training

- Information on [COVID-19](#), how to prevent it from spreading, and which underlying health conditions may make individuals more susceptible to contracting the virus.
- Self-screening at home, including temperature and/or symptom checks using [CDC guidelines](#).
- The importance of not coming to work if employees have a frequent cough, fever, difficulty breathing, chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, recent loss of taste or smell, or if they or someone they live with have been diagnosed with COVID-19.
- To seek medical attention if their symptoms become severe, including persistent pain or pressure in the chest, confusion, or bluish lips or face. Updates and further details are available on [CDC's webpage](#).
- The importance of frequent handwashing with soap and water, including scrubbing with soap for 20 seconds (or using hand sanitizer with at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol when employees cannot get to a sink or handwashing station, per [CDC guidelines](#)).
- The importance of physical distancing, both at work and off work time (see Physical Distancing section below).
- Proper use of face coverings, including:
 - Face coverings do not protect the wearer and are not personal protective equipment (PPE).
 - Face coverings can help protect people near the wearer, but do not replace the need for physical distancing and frequent handwashing.
 - Employees should wash or sanitize hands before and after using or adjusting face coverings.
 - Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth.
 - Face coverings should be washed after each shift.



Individual Control Measures and Screening

- Provide temperature and/or symptom screenings for all workers at the beginning of their shift and any personnel entering the facility. Make sure the temperature/symptom screener avoids close contact with workers to the extent possible. Both screeners and employees should wear face coverings for the screening.
- Encourage workers who are sick or exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 to stay home.
- Employers should provide and ensure workers use all required protective equipment. Employers should consider where disposable glove use may be helpful to supplement frequent handwashing or use of hand sanitizer; examples are for workers who are screening others for symptoms or handling commonly touched items.
- Face coverings are strongly recommended when employees are in the vicinity of others. Workers should have face coverings available and wear them when in shared work areas, such as offices and listed properties. Face coverings must not be shared.
- Employers, brokers, and real estate licensees must take reasonable measures to remind clients that they should use face coverings when viewing a property in person.



Cleaning and Disinfecting Protocols for Workplaces

- Perform thorough cleaning on high traffic areas of offices and other shared workspaces (lobbies, meeting rooms, break rooms, etc.) and areas of ingress and egress (handrails, stairways, elevator controls, etc.). Frequently disinfect commonly used surfaces in shared work areas like counters, light switches, door handles, etc.
- Avoid sharing phones, other work supplies, or office equipment wherever possible. Never share PPE.
- Where such items must be shared, disinfect with a cleaner appropriate for the surface between shifts or uses, whichever is more frequent, including the following: shared office equipment, such as copiers, fax machines, printers, telephones, keyboards, staplers, staple removers, letter openers, surfaces in reception areas, shared work stations, etc.

- Instruct employees to wipe down and disinfect equipment that passes between employees and customers, including clipboards and keys after each use.
- Equip workplace terminals and desks with proper sanitation products, including hand sanitizer and sanitizing wipes and provide personal hand sanitizers to all employees.
- Ensure that sanitary facilities stay operational and stocked at all times and provide additional soap, paper towels, and hand sanitizer when needed.
- Install and encourage the use of hands-free devices, if possible, including motion sensor lights and automatic soap and paper towel dispensers.
- When choosing cleaning chemicals, employers should use products approved for use against COVID-19 on the [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)-approved](#) list and follow product instructions. Use disinfectants labeled to be effective against emerging viral pathogens, diluted household bleach solutions (5 tablespoons per gallon of water), or alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol that are appropriate for the surface. Provide employees training on manufacturer's directions and Cal/OSHA requirements for safe use. Workers using cleaners or disinfectants should wear gloves as required by the product instructions.
- Require employees to clean and disinfect personal work areas often and supply the necessary cleaning products.
- Modify hours if necessary, to ensure regular, thorough cleaning of office spaces.
- Consider installing portable high-efficiency air cleaners, upgrading the building's air filters to the highest efficiency possible, and making other modifications to increase the quantity of outside air and ventilation in offices and other spaces.



Cleaning and Disinfecting Protocols for Shown Properties

- Thoroughly clean shown properties and disinfect commonly used surfaces including counters, door and cabinet handles, key lock boxes, keypads, toilets, sinks, light switches, etc. These surfaces must be cleaned and disinfected before and after each showing.
- During a showing, introduce fresh outside air, for example by opening doors/windows and operating ventilation systems.

- Instruct employees to wipe down and disinfect equipment that passes between employees and customers, including clipboards and keys, after each use.
- Provide time for workers to implement cleaning practices before and after shifts. If cleaning is assigned to the worker, they must be compensated for that time.
- Equip shown properties with proper sanitation products, including hand sanitizer and sanitizing wipes, for use by employees and clients.
- Provide and strongly recommend clients, real estate licensees, and inspectors to use face coverings and hand sanitizer. Place these items at the property entrance so that people can put them on before entering. Ensure disposable covers are properly discarded after use, for example in a trash bag that is sealed prior to disposal.
- All people entering a property, including agents, brokers, inspectors, and clients, must wash hands with soap and water immediately upon entry and before touring or inspecting the property, or use hand sanitizer when handwashing facilities are not available.
- Adjust or modify showings to provide adequate time for regular deep cleaning and disinfecting. If the property is currently occupied, ensure adequate time to disinfect after occupants leave for showings and before and after clients view the property.



Physical Distancing Guidelines for Workplaces

- Implement measures to ensure physical distancing of at least six feet between employees and customers. This can include use of physical partitions or visual cues (e.g., floor markings or signs to indicate to where employees should stand).
- Utilize work practices, when feasible and necessary, to limit the number of employees at the office at one time. This may include scheduling (e.g., staggering start/end times), establishing alternating days for on-site reporting, returning to the office workspace in phases, or continued use of telework when feasible.
- Redesign office spaces, cubicles, etc. and decrease the capacity for conference and meeting rooms to ensure workspaces allow for six feet between employees.

- Designate separate routes for entry and exit into office spaces to help maintain social distancing and lessen the instances of people closely passing each other, if possible. Establish directional hallways and passageways for foot traffic, if possible, to eliminate employees from passing by one another.
- Close or restrict, using barriers, or separating tables/chairs in common areas where personnel are likely to congregate and interact, such as kitchenettes and break rooms. Discourage employees from congregating in high traffic areas such as bathrooms and hallways. Limit the number of individuals riding in an elevator and ensure the use of face coverings.
- Close self-service coffee, water, and snack areas. Provide individual water bottles if there is no other suitable potable water source.
- Stagger employee breaks, within compliance with wage and hour regulations, to maintain physical distancing protocols.
- Display signage at entrances and waiting areas to remind people of physical distancing and face covering usage at every opportunity. Dedicate staff to direct guests to meeting rooms upon entry to office space rather than congregating in lobbies or common areas.
- Discontinue nonessential travel and encourage distance meetings via phone and internet.
- Discontinue shared vehicle trips between employees, contractors, clients, etc. Each party should travel in their own vehicle to offices, properties, or other locations that require in-person activities.
- Require employees to avoid handshakes and similar greetings that break physical distance.
- Avoid passing transaction materials such as pens, paperwork, and keys back and forth between employees and customers.
- Complete real estate transactions with all related parties digitally if feasible. Maintain physical distance when in-person meetings are required with escrow agents, loan officers, mortgage brokers, etc. Meet in spaces that allow for at least six feet of physical distance, such as outside.
- Eliminate person-to-person contact for delivery of goods to physical offices. Avoid touching others' pens and clipboards.



Physical Distancing Guidelines for Shown Properties

- Discontinue holding open houses and showings open to the general public on a walk-in basis; use an appointment or digital sign-in process to control the number of people in the house or property.
- Ensure current occupants are away from property during showings, consistent with their legal rights.
- Utilize virtual tours in lieu of open houses via digital technologies, social media, etc. in lieu of property showings whenever possible. If virtual tours are not feasible, limit the number of people present during showings. When a real estate licensee or renter is present, maintain physical distance at all times.
- Employees and/or contractors must open doorways or other areas of ingress and egress prior to in-person property showings to minimize clients touching surfaces.
- Real estate licensees should remind clients to maintain physical distancing during showings and to refrain from touching handles, switches, pulls, etc.
- All persons on property for in-person showings should avoid touching knobs, faucets, toilets and toilet handles, light switches, garage door opener buttons, handles and pulls, alarm system controls, fan pulls, remotes, thermostats, switchboxes, gates and gate latches, window locks and sashes, pool coverings, and other such items.
- Prior to and concluding in-person showings, real estate licensees must disinfect mobility and safety fixtures on the property such as handrails and banisters.
- All home inspectors and prospective homebuyers who accompany the inspectors should use face coverings while performing on-property inspections. Home inspectors must have access to and utilize soap and hand sanitizer.
- All information must be delivered electronically. Discontinue providing handouts or other types of promotional or informational materials.

¹Additional requirements must be considered for vulnerable populations. The real estate industry must comply with all [Cal/OSHA](#) standards and be prepared to adhere to its guidance as well as guidance from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) and the [California Department of Public Health \(CDPH\)](#). Additionally, employers must be prepared to alter their operations as those guidelines change.

