

BACK TO WORK SERIES

PREPARE YOUR BUILDING

If you would like to speak to us about any of this guidance or have any questions about the workplace during the pandemic, one of our experts will be happy to help. Contact us at:
response@macegroup.com

As governments across the globe develop plans to kick-start their economies, companies are slowly getting back business and are planning for a very different return to the workplace.

Ensuring workplaces are safe and legally compliant is the priority, while also preparing for phased returns, new ways of working and reduced capacity.

Providing reassurance to employees that they are returning to a safe workplace is an essential part of the return to work process.

Deploying technology and social distancing tools can enhance the user experience while re-enforcing the new ways of working – something we must all adapt to in the coming months.

Our back to work guidance provides practical advice to enable workplaces to operate safely while complying with current government guidelines.

In the first of a series of guidelines for welcoming employees back into the office, we look at preparing the building for occupation.

GETTING BACK TO BUSINESS

Over the next few weeks and months, commercial buildings around the world will see teams re-occupy workspaces, where changes will need to be implemented to make the workplace welcoming and, importantly, COVID-19 safe.

In order for buildings to reopen, building services and critical infrastructure systems need to be brought back online, ensuring facilities can function without risk. This is alongside designing new desk arrangements and introducing new procedures for safe distancing, such as entry points, staircases and lift usage.

BUILDING SYSTEMS

Ensuring your building systems are safe and stable in order to resume operations is one of the most important tasks in our back to work guidance.

Systems that have previously been shut down will need to be brought back into service and, as necessary, validated as compliant with up-to-date government guidance. Some important key activities that need addressing and need adequate time to complete prior to reoccupation are:

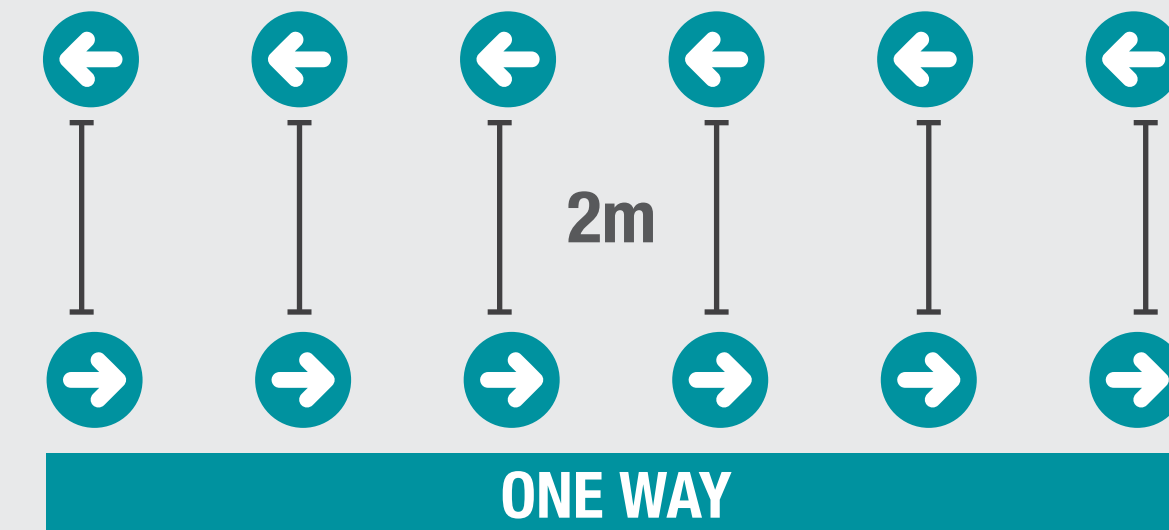
- Ensure all life safety systems such as fire alarms and emergency lighting are operational and compliant.
- Ensure site water supplies are clean and that water treatment programs that may have been paused are restarted.
- Increase ventilation and disable recirculation systems.
- Check that building management system (BMS) timeclocks reflect new occupancy times if these have changed.
- Carry out maintenance tasks on critical and life safety equipment.

MANAGING RISK AND PEOPLE FLOW

As offices and workplaces begin to reopen, the risk of overcrowding increases, in turn increasing the threat of infection.

Some areas within the workplace will present more risk than others and it is important that these are identified with appropriate measures taken to mitigate that risk. High risk areas such as a reception, lift lobbies, lift cars, coffee points, restaurants, restrooms, shower and changing areas, all require a great frequency of cleaning and processes for managing traffic flow.

Circulation paths where employees may come into close contact with one another need to be identified and clearly signposted to support social distancing.



REOCCUPATION AND CAPACITY ASSESSMENT

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25–30%

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With social distancing, building occupancy will be severely limited. It will not be uncommon to find that new occupancy levels will be reduced to 25-30% of what they previously were.

Even with lower occupancy numbers, social distancing will create bottlenecks for lifts, staircases, reception areas and create queues to get in and out the building at busy times. Staggering start and finishing times for employees will help, especially if there are colleagues on hand to manage the flow of people.

This same challenge also applies to catering facilities during lunch hours as employees may feel disinclined to venture out for lunch even if outlets are open.

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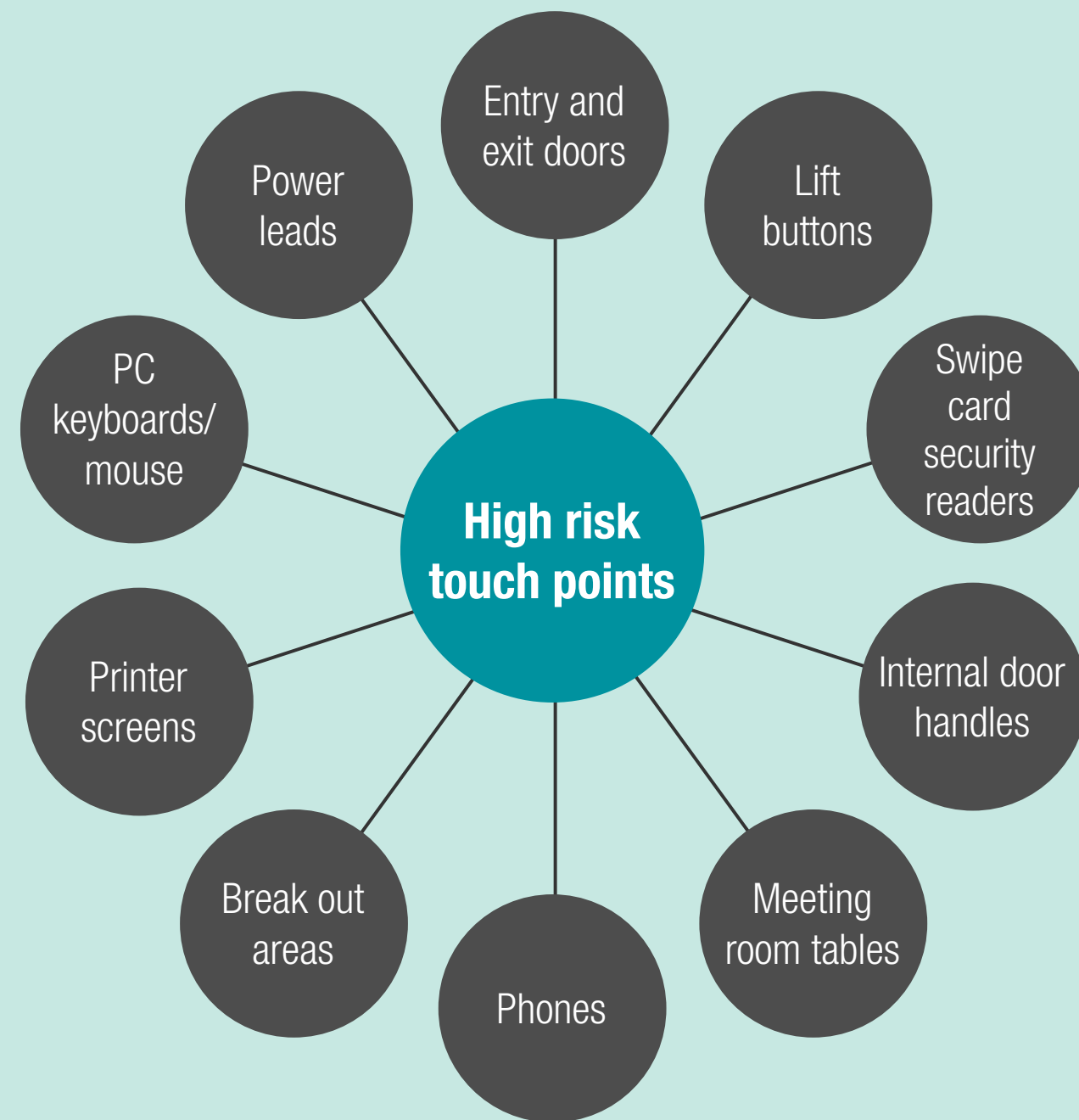
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TOUCH POINTS

Understanding the user journey within the workplace is key to identifying high traffic touch points. COVID-19 can remain active on hard surfaces longer than soft surfaces, therefore hard surfaces present a higher risk.

UK Government advice published in February 2020 suggests that human coronaviruses can survive on inanimate objects and can remain viable for up to five days at temperatures of 22-25°C and relative humidity of 40-50%, which is typical of air-conditioned indoor environments.



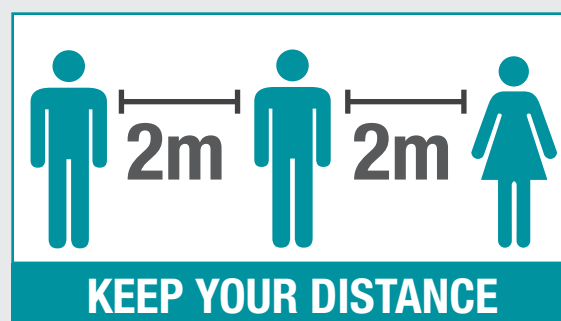
Installing hand sanitising stations and providing sanitising wipes to all building users will allow employees and visitors to keep their desk areas and communal areas, such as tea points and printers, clean throughout the day.

LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND PROCEDURES

Local workplace procedures should be developed and communicated to employees prior to their return to work. These written procedures could include:

- Guidance for managers on who should return to work and the phasing of when they may return. This would include workspace planning, location and numbers of desks available.
- Clear policy guidance for employees classed as vulnerable or having caring responsibilities for those who are vulnerable.
- Specific guidance on how people should enter, exit and use the workplace. This should be for both returning employees and visitors and be mindful of those needing special assistance.
- Working from home standards, including display screen equipment (DSE) and ergonomic assessments, to be created for employees continuing to work from home for longer term duration.
- Surveys or testing to be available for employees displaying symptoms.
- Procedures implemented for anyone showing COVID-19 symptoms while at work.
- Assessment of adequate numbers of fire marshals and first aiders for new occupancy figures.
- Re-evaluation of crisis response teams given potentially reduced occupancy figures.

SIGNAGE



To help building users within the workplace, signage should be adopted to raise awareness and support social distancing rules. Signage should be placed at key touch point locations and high traffic areas.

Signage should be changed occasionally to prevent familiarity and keep the messaging fresh. Signs should be clear and easy to understand for the reader, while the use of bold text and graphics will make signage more effective.

COMMUNICATIONS

The coronavirus pandemic has seen businesses increase communications with their employees in recent months. A crucial part of returning to the workplace will be managing the expectations of employees and visitors, ensuring they are kept updated on new initiatives and have the opportunity to provide feedback. New rules relating to workplace reoccupation need to be clear and consistent. Employees should be updated regularly, before the workplace reopens and following their return to work.

Communication with building occupants and visitors is vital and will give employees confidence that their safety and wellbeing is considered a priority.

Feedback and survey data can provide analytics, which can be used to make improvements and updates to the workplace in a way that benefits the end user.