



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
**DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING &
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Charles D. Baker, Governor ♦ Karyn E. Polito, Lieutenant Governor ♦ Jennifer D. Maddox, Undersecretary

PHN 2020-24

To: Local Housing Authorities
From: Ben Stone, Associate Director, Division of Public Housing
Subject: Design and Funding Guidelines for Adapting LHA Office Spaces for Social Distancing and Indoor Air Quality
Date: June 22, 2020

DHCD is providing the below recommendations to Local Housing Authorities (LHAs) to support compliance with the guidelines set forth by the Governor's Office in the Mandatory Safety Standards for the Workplace. While DHCD does not yet require LHA's to bring staff into office or open offices to the public, LHAs should start work on adapting office spaces, if necessary, to be ready for future phases of reopening.

If an LHA office needs substantial work in order to comply with the Mandatory Safety Standards through implementation of these design recommendations, the LHA may request up to \$10,000 in Compliance Reserve funds. Capital funds may only be used on appropriate expenditures – see guide on [page 43 and 44 of the DHCD Modernization guidelines](#).

PROCESS FOR REQUESTING FUNDS

1. Submit a CIP revision containing your proposed work and a request for Compliance Reserve funds
2. Project name should begin with "Covid-19 Office Adaptation:<insert description of scope>"
3. Requests for Compliance Reserve funds for projects with this title cannot exceed \$10,000.
4. Every LHA is eligible to submit 1 project with this title and receive 1 CR award up to \$10,000. If your project TDC exceeds that amount, the balance must be funded by the LHA using its Formula Funding.

Below you will find links to relevant resources and design recommendations/action steps on how these limited resources may be used in a typical LHA office space/waiting area. **Please note that not all recommendations will apply to every space.** If you have questions relating to your particular space, please contact Jim McCurdy for architectural questions at James.mccurdy@mass.gov, Frank Bossi for engineering questions at Frank.bossi@mass.gov, or your RCAT PM to discuss. If you have questions about the distribution of funds for this award, please contact Stefanie Brynen at Stefanie.brynen@mass.gov.

LINKS TO RELEVANT RESOURCES ON RE-OPENING:

- Reopening: Mandatory Safety Standards for Workplaces <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/reopening-mandatory-safety-standards-for-workplaces>
- Safety Standards and Checklist: Office Spaces <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/safety-standards-and-checklist-office-spaces>
- Office Space Checklist <https://www.mass.gov/doc/office-spaces-checklist/download>
- Mold and Legionella Reopening Guidance <https://www.mass.gov/doc/mold-and-legionella-reopening-guidance/download>

- Addressing Stagnant Water in Buildings <https://www.mass.gov/doc/addressing-stagnant-water-in-buildings/download>
- ASHRAE Position Document on Infectious Aerosols – This document should be discussed with a licensed engineer:
https://www.ashrae.org/file%20library/about/position%20documents/pd_infectiousaerosols_2020.pdf

DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS / ACTION STEPS TO CONSIDER UNDERTAKING IN YOUR OFFICE SPACE TO ENABLE SOCIAL DISTANCING AND TO IMPROVE THE AIR QUALITY:

PARTITIONING SPACE TO MINIMIZE DROPLET PROLIFERATION:

- Erect Plexiglas partitions at the reception desk. These can be in wood frames if necessary or simply screwed into the front of existing reception walls or desks, if possible. A slot at the bottom of the window may be used to pass papers back and forth, as well as allow for sound to be transmitted. You could also consider creating a hole in the office wall to allow for a new partition, if none currently exists, and you would like to limit resident or visitor interaction with staff.
- Erect a Plexiglas partition that sits on top of the bottom portion of your existing Dutch door if that is the communication portal for the office. Or, if there is not a Dutch door, you might consider adding one with a Plexiglas partition, if you have a small office, and the means of communication has typically been for residents to walk into the office. Be sure that the existing door to be modified or replaced is not considered a fire door.
- Raise the height of existing work stations or install new, easily cleaned dividers between work stations. Dividers should be at least 77” high. Some partitions may have standard extensions, which could also be used.

IMPROVE INDOOR AIR QUALITY:

- Open windows regularly, even if it is warm outside. Outside air circulation will refresh the air circulating around the room.
- Evaluate existing air systems and consider whether steps need to be taken to increase outside air circulation in the space mechanically.
 - This action may require the services of a mechanical engineer to assess your mechanical system’s capabilities and recommend actions to be taken. LHAs may request to use a house doctor mechanical engineer for this purpose; if so please contact simone.early@mass.gov.
 - If your building has a system that is currently not functional, a capital project may be required to bring it back online or replace it. Those actions should be taken as soon as possible, so that the building can have outside air circulating by the time employees return.
 - If your building has a mechanical system that is turned off but is functional, it should be turned on now, prior to building occupancy, and operated (fan only) continuously at 100% outside air for the duration of the non-heating season (with cooling turned on only when the building is occupied and when the weather warrants cooling).
 - Many outside air systems are already operating at 100% outside air. If you have a newer, outside air system, check with your mechanical engineer to see if the system has cooling coils to temper outside air in the summer, and return a percentage of air that recirculates in the ductwork. Mechanical systems which have this cooling feature with recirculation should be set

to go to 100% outside air intake. This may require an HVAC technician to rebalance the air flows and shut off the recirculation duct damper.

- Increase air flow in restrooms by leaving bathroom fans active at all times. Verify that fan vents to the exterior.
- **A note on all air mechanical systems in 667 developments:** Mechanical systems in the units in these buildings do not recirculate air between units. There will be no cross-contamination between units due to the mechanical system.
- **A note on mechanical systems in 689 and some 667 congregate developments:** 689 developments typically have mechanical systems which cool and recirculate air throughout the building. They only have an outside air intake of 10%. Although the systems cannot be modified to eliminate air recirculation within the building, you should check with an HVAC technician to assess the feasibility of increasing the outside air percentage. In addition, it may be possible to upgrade the HVAC filter to filter for smaller particles associated with viruses, but you would need to make sure there is no excessive pressure drop (PD) that could be detrimental to the fan and equipment. Due to the needs of the residents, you **should not** shut off cooling within 689 buildings.
- Air purification measures:
 - All properties may benefit from upgrading HVAC filters to filter for smaller particles associated with viruses. You would need to make sure there is no excessive pressure drop (PD) that could be detrimental to the fan and equipment. As noted above, an HVAC technician would determine this.
 - Use a portable air purification unit in a small office, particularly if there is difficulty opening windows.
 - Disinfect toilets which have been out of use during remote work period. The temporary shutdown or reduced operation of a building and reductions in normal water use can create hazards for returning occupants; these hazards can include expelling mold and Legionella into the air. See the Mold and Legionella Reopening guidance noted above under reference links.

PROVIDE SOCIAL DISTANCING SPACE:

- Provide an exterior, secure lock-box for dropping items such as monthly checks, signed leases or other items.
- Create an online or outdoor sign-up location for residents to sign-up for office visits.
- Provide an exterior buzzer and camera to manage the number of people entering the office.
- Require face coverings for all staff and residents using office.
- Determine the capacity of the waiting room and mark social distancing quadrants for waiting residents and visitors.
- Provide markings on the ground inside and outside of the office to indicate where residents and staff should stand or walk while waiting for or receiving service.
- Provide markings on the ground in the elevator lobbies to delineate where residents should wait and line up to use the elevator. Consider requesting that staff use stairs in lieu of the elevator to minimize lines at elevators, where feasible.

HANDSANITIZING STATIONS:

- Provide hand sanitizing stations at high-touch areas, such as in the waiting room of the office, the mail room, and in laundry rooms. This could be in the form of a sink, if feasible, or just a table upon which a bottle of hand sanitizer is placed. Use of touchless faucets is advised; if that is not feasible, provide paper towels for use in turning faucets on and off.

PREPARE FOR THE COOLING SEASON – Multiple Options for Consideration:

- If you are imposing any sort of line for residents to enter the office, provide shaded or rain-cover areas at the exterior of the building for waiting.
- Provide shaded/covered areas for residents and staff, outside of the building, to allow for socially distant breaks from interior spaces.
- If the majority of your residents have air conditioners, particularly window units, have some additional window AC units in storage which can be used in extreme heat for those who either do not have units or whose unit malfunctions during the climate event. This will allow residents to remain in their units when a community room cannot be used.
- Determine with your local community if they are providing large, socially distanced, cooling centers, such as school gyms. Locations within walking distance would be preferred; however, LHAs may need to provide transportation to and from the cooling center, particularly for elderly or disabled residents.
- If feasible, provide misting stations as an exterior cooling system.
- Provide exterior, single person seating in shaded areas. Small socially distanced bench groupings may be appropriate to allow for limited social engagement.

Please contact your DHCD Project Manager with any questions.