

As of April 30, 2020

Getting ready to reopen your store

As states and local jurisdictions lift stay-at-home orders and more businesses reopen, you must carefully plan how you will resume your operations. Your highest priority is to do so safely for employees and customers. Furthermore, you must take steps to build confidence that you offer a healthy environment in your store and workspaces. The following guidelines have been developed by the National Retail Federation, the Home Furnishings Association and other contributors.

Employees

Employment issues loom large, and not only because full loan forgiveness under the Paycheck Protection Program depends on restoring your workforce. The Family First Coronavirus Response Act allows paid leave for workers who have to stay home to care for children whose schools are closed. Some employees with underlying health concerns might balk at returning to work. Everyone may have to work in different ways. Here are some recommendations:

- Create a return-to-work team. Have it re-examine every job your workforce performs with the objective of recasting roles and responsibilities in light of the coronavirus experience. For example, who can close contact with others be limited?
- Write a transition plan. Is your goal to return to full operations as quickly as permitted or to take a gradual approach? Draw a map to get you there.
- Decide who should return to work and when. Question to answer include: What work must be done first? What can wait? What can still be done from home? Who has health issues or other reasons for staying home longer?
- Personnel policies. What should change in light of the coronavirus? Should employees be granted more sick leave? Family leave? Leaves of absence for self-quarantine? Reimbursement for personal protective equipment purchases?
- Transition from furlough. Prepare a communication plan for calling employees back to work. Review local laws concerning recall and worker retention rights. Does your state equate a furlough to a termination? Is there paperwork that addresses that? Research how to respond if furloughed employees refuse to return to work or request special accommodations.
- Establish protocols for dealing with employees who are or are suspected of being infected with the coronavirus. What information must the employee disclose and

to whom? What are your notification responsibilities? What other steps are required?

- Consider screening/testing.
- Set rules for visitors, vendors and others in the workplace. Determine what policies will apply to temporary workers, independent contractors, vendors and visitors when they are in your workplace. What protocols govern how they interact with your customers?
- Pay, hours, schedules, benefits. Consider whether to adjust salaries, commissions, incentives and benefits, including medical coverage.

Logistics/Operations

A furniture business conducts operations in very different spaces: showrooms, offices, warehouses and delivery trucks/customers' homes. All require different plans and policies for when they reopen and resume operations. Some considerations:

- Evaluate facilities. If you have multiple stores, you should evaluate their performance before the crisis and forecast their performance going forward in an altered environment. Look at rent/lease, utilities, employee costs and other overhead. Determine whether it makes sense to reopen all stores at the same time or at all.
- Showroom vs. warehouse. With the need for social distancing in your store, consider whether you want to display less product on your showroom floor, allowing more space between customers and employees. Would this require more warehouse space?
- Online or in store. With your store closed, your website and social media channels likely have become more important. Consider whether that should be a permanent development. If so, plan to put more resources into online as you display more product digitally.
- Delivery changes. Plan whether to resume full delivery service as soon as you reopen your store or start partial service – front door delivery, for example. Should you enhance pickup options? Develop a plan to communicate changes to your customers.

Facilities: Preparing the store for opening

- For leased properties, work with your landlord and your local jurisdiction to obtain early access to ready the store for return-to-work (deep cleaning, retrofitting as necessary for new regulations, installation of new signage, etc.).
- Thoroughly inspect facilities for any damage or issues caused by vacancy including mechanical, air and water systems.

- Clean and prepare equipment for startup; install sneeze guards or other protective measures, as necessary and/or required.
- Consider facility enhancements such as increased fresh air circulation and installing the highest-rated filters recommended or allowed by manufacturer.
- Identify which vendors and/or distribution centers are functioning, and the extent to which they may be delayed or limited in their operations. Establish contingency plan for vendor disruptions.
- Establish protocol for monitoring store occupancy in compliance with any applicable regulations.
- If applicable, establish procedures for the use of escalators and elevators to avoid crowding (e.g., elevator attendants, queue management for waiting passengers, etc.).
- In multi-tenant buildings such as malls, determine who's responsible for screening customers (for temperature, for example) if required – you or mall management?
- If you are required to screen customers, identify an appropriate location, respecting privacy and social-distancing protocols.

Signage

- Familiarize yourself with new signage requirements and needs (occupancy, social distancing, customer flow, etc.).
- Make sure signs are placed in visible locations and their wording is authoritative, firm but customer-friendly. Some signs should signal your desire to protect customers.

Supply chain and inventory

- Assess supply needs and explore options for sourcing additional supplies required for business operations; assess how to best leverage existing relationships with vendors.
- Create a plan for how you will source and distribute cleaning products and PPE, accounting for existing and/or future shortages. Establish a protocol to monitor this on a frequent basis as rules and health guidance ebb and flow with the prevalence of the virus.
- Establish procedure for regularly disinfecting inventory and newly received deliveries.
- Establish protocols for handling and processing shipping and receipts (including disinfection).

- Evaluate current situation as it relates to ports of entry and trucking logistics for your product. Will this impact your ability to timely resupply, both now and in the medium term? Keep an eye out for future legislation that could have the effect of requiring truck drivers to quarantine upon crossing state-lines, etc., thereby further disrupting the supply chain.

Business hours

- Adjust store hours of operation, if necessary, to allow more time for cleaning or to limit personal interactions.
- Ensure staff has sufficient time to rest, sanitize and restock inventory.
- Consider increasing pickup hours to serve more customers who don't want to accept delivery.

Establish protocol for vendors and non-employees

- Notify vendors of reopening and any revised protocol as it relates to store entry, deliveries, paperwork, etc.
- Consider implementing measures to ensure vendor safety, including:
 - Disabling/suspending access to non-employee truck drivers from entering stores and warehouses.
 - Transitioning to contactless signatures/e-signatures for deliveries.
 - Schedule more time between deliveries.
 - Ask vendors to instruct their employees follow social-distancing guidelines and public health directives.

Security

- Revise security protocols to conform to local and state health directives.
- Consider in-store announcements to remind customers of social-distancing rules.
- Decide how employees should respond to customers who violate social-distancing and other protocols and provide training.

Promote “contactless” shopping options

- Online shopping.
- Contactless payment options (e.g., RFID credit and debit cards, Apple Pay, etc.).
- Self-checkout.
- Pickup and delivery.

Health policy

A returning workforce needs appropriate health policies, practices, engineering controls and protective equipment. Employer practices should be designed to discourage contagious employees and customers from entering the store, screen those who enter, and mitigate the effect of contagious individuals in the store. This section will highlight various key health protections and safeguards to keep in mind as you seek a return to normal (or somewhat normal) operations for your distribution centers, stores, and supply chains.

Social distancing

Place signage in conspicuous locations throughout the store, particularly high-traffic areas such as entrances and exits, checkouts, etc. Signage may include:

- Asking customers and employees not to enter the store if they are sick or have felt sick within the last 72 hours.
- Encouraging customers and employees to maintain six feet of distance at all times, per CDC guidelines.
- Entrance-exit or one-way only signs.
- Recommended hygiene practices.
- CDC posters promoting frequent and thorough handwashing in all restrooms.
- Temperature screening of customers through infrared thermometers or thermal scanners, with employees or third-party contractors turning away individuals with fevers.
- Implement and encourage use of contactless payment options and contactless signatures for deliveries.
- As much as possible, stagger work shifts and meal breaks to separate employees.
- Widen high-traffic areas if the store configuration allows.

Face masks and personal protective equipment (PPE)

- Encourage or require employees and customers to wear approved facial coverings, gloves and PPE. Keep a supply to offer customers if they come in without.
- Decide whether employees will be allowed to use their own PPE and, if so, set a standard for quality.
- Provide receptacles for discarded PPE.

Cleaning/sanitization

- Obtain cleaning products that are on the EPA's List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2.
- Make sure that cleaning "kits," including disinfectant wipes or sprays, disposable gloves, paper towels, masks, hand sanitizer and other cleaning supplies are readily accessible throughout the store.
- Implement a cleaning regime that targets frequently touched surfaces and spaces, such as:
 - Door and drawer handles.
 - Light and other power switches.
 - Shared tools such as pricing guns, pallet jacks, tape guns, box cutters, etc.
 - Furniture, both for use by employees or on display for sale.
 - Vending machines and self-serve kiosks.
 - Refrigerators, microwaves and other frequently touched objects and surfaces in employee breakrooms.
 - Cash registers, including touch screens, keyboards, mouse.
 - PIN Pads (touch screen, keypad and pen).
 - Checkout counter.
 - Cabinet pulls.
 - Rest room door handles and flush levers.
 - Toilet and toilet paper holders.
 - Sinks and faucets.
 - Paper towel holders and/or air dryers.
 - Diaper-changing stations.

Employee training

- Develop social-distancing guidelines and expectations.
- How to monitor personal health and body temperature at home.
- How to properly wear, remove and dispose of face masks and gloves.
- Guidance on how to launder cloth face masks and uniforms.
- Cleaning protocols, including how to safely and effectively use cleaning supplies.