

Reopening Your Law Office

Resources from the California Lawyers Association

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As of May, law firms have begun to [gradually reopen offices across the state](#) that were closed during shelter-in-place orders. If your law firm is ready to take that step, the California Lawyers Association wants to make sure you have the information you need to keep you, your employees and your clients safe.

We have prepared this step-by-step guide using [recommendations from the California Department of Public Health](#). We'd also like to thank the New York and Indiana state bar associations for their inspiration and insight.

What You Need to Know

Law firms are included in Stage 2 of Gov. Gavin Newsom's [Resilience Roadmap](#), which calls for gradual reopening of low-risk businesses such as offices. Telework is still strongly encouraged. However, some counties are allowing low-risk workplaces such as offices to reopen as long as they undergo modifications to prevent the spread of the virus. [Check the latest county-by-county guidance](#).

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO REOPENING YOUR LAW OFFICE



Step 1: Designate a Transition Team to meet the Requirements Set by the California Department of Public Health

Your transition team **must**:

- Perform a detailed risk assessment and implement a site-specific protection plan
- Train employees on how to limit the spread of COVID-19, including how to screen themselves for symptoms and stay home if they have them
- Implement individual control measures and screenings
- Implement disinfecting protocols
- Implement physical distancing guidelines

→ It is critical that employees needing to self-isolate because of COVID-19 are encouraged to stay at home, with sick leave policies to support that, to prevent further infection in your workplace.

→ It is important for employees who are at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19 because of their age or health condition to take actions to reduce their risk of getting sick with the disease.

Step 2: Create a Written Worksite Specific Plan

Your plan should include:

- The person(s) responsible for implementing the plan.
- A risk assessment and the measures that will be taken to prevent spread of the virus.
- Training and communication with employees and employee representatives on the plan.
- A process to check for compliance and to document and correct deficiencies.
- A process to investigate COVID-cases, alert the local health department, and identify and isolate close workplace contacts of infected employees until they are tested.

Step 3: Prepare the Building/Workplace

This is especially important if the building has been closed. Consider cleaning plans, pre-return inspections of HVAC and other mechanical systems.

- Coordinate with landlords and/or other building tenants on opening and safety procedures in common areas and elevators.
- Stagger workstations and occupied offices to increase the distance between employees.
- Install barriers for receptionists and other employees in high foot traffic locations.
- Inventory cleaning and other supplies to maintain a disinfected environment.
- Develop a cleaning and sanitizing protocol in accordance with CDC and CAL/OSHA recommendations.
- Install signs outlining social distancing and hygiene guidelines.

Step 4: Prepare Your Workforce

Develop plans to mitigate anxiety. This may include policies for deciding when each employee returns and a communications plan to educate employees about workplace and policy changes.

- Decide which employees will return to the workplace. Encourage those who can continue to work effectively remotely to do so until further notice.
- Keep in mind that [Executive Order N-62-20](#) provides that employees who contract COVID-19 while working outside their home between March 19 and July 5 are presumed to have been infected at work and may pursue a claim through the workers' compensation system.
- Stagger workday hours and monitor returns.
- Discourage visits by lawyers from other branch offices.
- Maintain attendance sheets to provide responsible contract tracing information, if needed, and to limit and track hours in the office.

Step 5: Educate Your Employees About COVID-19

- Provide information on preventing the spread of the disease and identifying who is especially vulnerable.
- Use CDC guidelines to teach employees how to self-screen at home—including temperature and/or symptom checks—and when to seek medical attention.
- Stress 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.
- Highlight the importance of hand washing and physical distancing, both at work and off work time.

Step 6: Use Best Practices to Minimize the Risk of Spreading Infection

- Evaluate the need for symptom screenings and/or temperature checks.
- Insist that employees who are sick or exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 stay home.
- Strongly recommend people wear cloth face masks/covers when practical, especially when going to restrooms or common areas of the office. In some counties, face coverings may be required.
- Close breakrooms or take other steps to increase distance such as spacing out chairs and tables or providing break areas in open spaces.
- Discourage travel by mass transit. If mass transit is unavoidable, educate employees on best practices for minimizing risk.
- Decide whether the law firm will supply safely dispensed disposable cups and plasticware or require employees to bring their own.

Step 7: Reduce Touch Points and Increase Cleaning

- Perform thorough cleaning in high traffic areas.
- Frequently disinfect commonly used surfaces and personal work areas.
- Minimize or eliminate the use of communal supplies and technology such as conference-room AV equipment, copiers, postage machines, etc.
- Leave lights on if possible. Install motion-activated doors, lights and fixtures if feasible. Remove non-essential doors or door handles if possible. Provide wall-mounted disinfectant dispensers.
- Clean and sanitize shared equipment between each use.
- Equip shared spaces with proper sanitation products, including hand sanitizer and sanitizing wipes and ensure availability.
- Use products approved for use against COVID-19 on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved list and follow product instructions and Cal/OSHA requirements.

Step 8: Do Business Using Physical Distancing Guidelines

- Encourage the use of technology for remote mediations, hearings and depositions.
- Limit the number of people coming into the office at the same time.
- Reconfigure office spaces, cubicles, etc. and decrease maximum capacity for conference and meeting areas.
- Adjust in-person meetings, if they are necessary, to ensure physical distancing.
- Limit the number of individuals riding in an elevator and ensure the use of face covers.