



AIA Indiana

To: AIA Indiana Members

From: AIA Indiana Committee on the Environment (COTE)

Date: April 23, 2020

Re: COVID-19 – What We Can Do

As we Hoosiers are doing our part to “flatten the curve”, and anxiously await an eventual loosening of the social distancing guidelines we are living under; it is important to think about our buildings and the role they play in the potential containment of infection. The COVID-19 pandemic will undoubtedly change the way we live and do business, and when we re-enter our businesses and economies, we will do so with an additional sense of caution. Proper maintenance, cleaning, and disinfecting are key; but the built environment can serve as part of that change and offer an additional line of defense to contain the spread of infection.

WHAT WE CAN DO TODAY

In the immediate future, building owners and operators can take several low-cost steps today in preparation for re-opening to the public such as:

1. Locating hand-sanitizer stations near doors and other high-traffic/high-touch areas.
2. Place temporary signage indicating reduced occupancy counts and reminders to maintain six feet of distance.
3. Setting HVAC systems to introduce more fresh air. In adverse weather conditions, this likely comes with an energy penalty, which can be mitigated by setting more air to recirculate during off-hours.
4. Replace air filters regularly – and upgrade them to a higher MERV rating if possible. Most air handling units can receive up to a MERV 13, which can catch around 80% of viruses; but check your operations manuals, as higher MERV ratings require higher fan power to move air through a finer-grained filter.
5. Ensure sufficient and clear directional signage to restrooms and handwashing facilities. For those facilities with keyed or locked restroom facilities – consider unlocking restrooms for a period of time to ensure that all occupants have access to handwashing facilities.
6. Provide paper towels at sinks and handwashing stations, which have been proven to better remove germs from hands.

7. Provide cashier's stands with [sneeze guards](#) and storage for disposable gloves to protect employees.

WHAT WE CAN DO MOVING FORWARD

In the near-term, building owners have the options for minor infrastructure upgrades that can make a big difference:

1. Air handling unit upgrades, such as UV sterilization or increased capacity to introduce more outside air into a space.
2. Integrate [humidity control](#) into air handling systems.
3. Consider "[free address](#)" office configurations, where desks are shared anew each day. Under such conditions, employees are less likely to store items upon; however, this solution is predicated on a steadfast policy of nightly sanitation by custodial staff.
4. Consider the use of uncoated copper or brass in door hardware and other high-touch surfaces. [Copper](#) (which is a part of brass alloys) has been known to kill bacteria and viruses.

While COVID-19 is new, and as such; much is unknown about it, the strategies above have been proven to be effective against a wide range of pathogens; and can be considered as we reopen our businesses and economies and resume life in a new normal. Over a longer period of time, we will learn much from the forced experiment of working remotely; and what other opportunities our buildings and infrastructure can offer. Throughout history, buildings and infrastructure have played a huge role in improving human health, most notably the infrastructure that delivers clean water into our homes and the sanitary sewers that remove waste; and this is another occasion that our buildings & infrastructure of the future will rise to.