



RHODE ISLAND
Bar Association



GUIDELINES FOR RE-OPENING YOUR PRACTICE

Before welcoming employees back to work, it is crucial to develop concrete strategies for reopening your practice. Each person and business will be impacted differently; the following guidelines are suggested steps, not standards, intended to promote a safer workplace not only for attorneys and employees, but also for the clients we serve. As a reminder, the COVID-19 situation is changing on a daily basis, so please continue to monitor required changes in protocols.

PREPARE THE WORKPLACE

- Most importantly, focus on the safety of your employees;
- Coordinate with landlords and other tenants in your building on opening and safety procedures in common areas and elevators;
- Reconfigure and/or reassign work spaces to allow for social distancing;
- Install barriers for receptionists or other employees in high foot traffic locations;
- Confirm you are stocked with the appropriate cleaning chemicals and supplies needed to maintain a disinfected working environment;
- Develop cleaning and sanitizing protocol in accordance with recommended CDC guidelines;
- Develop one-way foot traffic patterns if the workplace facility allows for it;
- Limit use of common and high-traffic areas in the workplace, such as cafeterias and other group meeting places;
- Ensure workplace mechanical components – including HVAC, fire/life safety systems, entry systems, and water temperature at hand washing locations meet recommended guidelines.



PREPARE YOUR EMPLOYEES

- Consider developing a plan to phase the return to work, such as bringing back employees in stages (instead of all at once), and/or staggering schedules for different employees or groups of employees to limit the number of employees in the workplace at any given time;
- Encourage remote work for roles that are conducive to teleworking until further notice;
- Discourage visits by lawyers from other branch offices;
- Maintain attendance sheets to provide responsible contact tracing information, if needed, and to limit and track hours in the office;
- Educate all staff on any new policies and procedures and clearly communicate all expectations.



BEST PRACTICES



MINIMIZE SPREADING INFECTION IN THE WORKPLACE

- To the extent practical, require employees to wear masks at all times while on premises, except while in their own office or workspace;
- Discourage socializing outside the workplace before entering the building;
- Implement and insist on social distancing;
- Limit face-to-face meetings and encourage use of videoconferencing (such as Skype or Zoom), even when all parties are on premises;
- Minimize non-essential business travel. If travel is unavoidable, require employees to self-isolate for an extended period of time upon return;
- In order to avoid deliveries from outside the office, staff should bring in their own food that is properly wrapped;
- Implement reasonable restrictions on use of restrooms and common areas to allow for social distancing;
- Require hand-washing, with soap supplied, at places and times feasible.

ENFORCE STRICT RULES ON SICK OR AT-RISK INDIVIDUALS

Remind employees if they are feeling ill, they should remain home and consult their physician. If remote work is not possible, then appropriate policies should be implemented regarding sick days or personal days. It is also important for employees who are at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19 because of their age or because they have a serious long-term health problem to take actions to reduce their risk of getting sick with the disease.



Emphasize and enforce vigilant infection prevention measures published by the CDC including frequent hand washing, sanitizing frequently touched surfaces, wearing masks and other PPE, maintaining social distancing, and updating staff as guidelines change.

BE MINDFUL OF WORKER ANXIETY



Returning to work after the extended COVID-19 pandemic shutdown can cause differing amounts of emotions – disbelief, fear and even anger among staff. It is important to remember each of our lives have been altered and directly impacted by this crisis. Returning to work after a pandemic is new territory for all of us, and we must have patience with ourselves and others while we navigate the process.

Employers and co-workers alike can watch for signs of emotional impact over the coming weeks and months, to ensure everyone is finding their way back to a new normal. If you feel you are in need of confidential assistance, please consider reaching out to either one of the FREE member benefits available to our members listed below.

Lawyers Helping Lawyers

If you find yourself seriously struggling with personal concerns and need someone to talk to, members of the Lawyers Helping Lawyers Committee are available to speak with you **CONFIDENTIALLY**. For more information, visit our website at ribar.com, and the *Do You Need Confidential Help Quick Link* or visit the Bar's Lawyers Helping Lawyers page, and scroll down the page for a list of members ready and willing to listen.

Coastline EAP

Coastline EAP is a private, non-profit consulting service contracted by the Association to assist you at no charge. The professionals at Coastline EAP provide confidential consultations for a wide range of personal concerns. If you are in need of assistance, you can contact Coastline EAP and identify yourself as a Rhode Island Bar Association member seeking help. To contact Coastline EAP please call 1-800-445-1195.