

A 15-Point Checklist for Reopening Your Business

As employers undertake the critical task of bringing employees and clients back safely to their work environments, they may find the evolving CDC public health guidelines, and those issued by the State of Michigan, to be overwhelming. Business owner and expert interior designer Shari Stein makes the process manageable in this 15-point checklist, drawing upon her breadth of knowledge and deep concern for the welfare of others.

- ❑ **Screens:** Plexiglass is a popular option, but because it scratches easily, it may be best regarded as a temporary solution depending on where it is installed. It is also hard to obtain and its cost has risen due to demand. Alternatives include glass, which is easy to clean, or durable polycarbonate, such as for a bank setting.



Whichever material you use to erect screens, avoid damaging custom millwork by retaining a firm to assist you to retrofit existing areas, and to customize new solutions. DesignTeam Plus collaborates with many fabricators, including Livonia-based [Burke Architectural Millwork](#), to select the best solution for any given space.

(image of Pickles & Rye Deli, West Bloomfield, MI)

- ❑ **Signage:** Place adequate signage in well-lit areas for temperature checks and health screening areas, and well-marked directions for following a one-way path to mitigate close contact with passersby. Signage must comply with ADA guidelines.
- ❑ **Safety markers:** Bring in measuring devices to demonstrate six-feet in length, and place markers to remind people to maintain physical distance. Do not take for granted that everyone knows or will remember what six feet is.
- ❑ **HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning):** Assess your system with a reputable firm before bringing employees and clients back to your facility. Change filters, keep windows open as much as possible, and incorporate plants and fans into windowless areas. “It’s important to keep the air circulating,” Shari says. “You always

want fresh air intake, so ask an HVAC company to perform a site inspection for operational windows. Look at the dehumidification system as well as air circulation.” Another option, especially for medical offices, is to choose a fogging system for disinfection.

- ❑ **Seating/Upholstery:** Check the specifications on your furniture fabric for proper maintenance. If you are looking to reupholster office furniture, bleach-cleanable and over 100,000 double rub fabrics will withstand heavy cleaning. When looking to purchase new office furniture, consider removable cushions or designs with no nooks or crannies where anything can grow.
 - ❑ **Outdoor/bar seating:** Make sure you place outdoor seating six feet apart at tables and at bars.
- ❑ **Carpets:** Anti-microbial carpets, such as those manufactured by [EF Contract](#), prevent bacterial growth, odor and VOCs (volatile organic compounds), thereby increasing the longevity of your flooring while protecting the environment. If you have hard-surface flooring, follow manufacturer-recommended guidelines on maintenance.
- ❑ **Wall surfaces:** Some commercial-grade vinyl is durable and washable, making it an easy product to maintain. A new coat of no- or low-volatile organic compound paint is a good option to clean and/or update facilities before bringing people back. You may also consider acoustical wall coverings and screens from a company such as [BuzziSpace](#), whose products are bleach- and ethanol-cleanable.
- ❑ **Work spaces:** Walk the length and width of your entire facility with your chief operating officer or office manager. Measure out where you can place desks, sanitizer stations, asking yourself, how far do you have to walk to find one. Don't put people face to face; desks should be spaced out six feet apart in every direction, unless there is a vertical screen between them in a bench situation.
 - ❑ **Work surfaces:** A spray-on growth inhibitor such as Covershield is harmless to people as it removes microorganisms; its active agent punctures the cell membranes. Covershield is optimal for high-traffic work surfaces such as conference room tables, lobbies, and front desk surfaces. It must be applied by a professional commercial cleaning company every 60-90 days. “I like it because it's environmentally safe for any business with a conference table, and it makes employees and clients feel comfortable,” Shari says.

Other options are laminate surfaces with built-in nanotechnology that is resistant to moisture and fungi, and reduces microbes. “Laminate with this

technology is a good option if you are renovating an existing workplace,” Shari says.

- ❑ **Ceilings:** In hospitality, medical, or educational facilities that require intensive measures, you may want to explore UV lights to kill viruses.
- ❑ **Plants:** The principles of biophilic design increase connection between nature and people. Choosing the right type of plants (i.e. spider, palm, and snake) will purify the air in your office, and show your employees you value their physical and mental health, as plants have also been shown to reduce stress at work. If you want to take it one step further, a living wall of greenery does wonders aesthetically and psychologically.
- ❑ **Light switches:** There are touchless options for operating light switches and thermostats. Check out voice implemented command products such as Alexa, Echo, Google, Nest, etc. All systems can be incorporated into the workplace to turn on/off lights and thermostat controls depending how large your workplace is. Generally, it is always energy efficient to have your lights on timers and sensors as you enter spaces.
- ❑ **Culture:** Don't forget the positive culture that you've worked hard to achieve! Take a look at your team-building and professional development activities, and determine what can be retooled for social distancing. Shari plans to bring back employee yoga (currently she is holding Zoom sessions), “to help eliminate the stress of returning to work and make employees productive. It was helpful before, and even more so now,” she says.
- ❑ **Pets:** Furry friends boost morale in the best of circumstances; now as employees may feel stressed if a coworker sneezes near them in the aftermath of COVID-19, the presence of pets in the office can help employees to stay calm, especially as deadlines and deliverables mount as the economy again picks up steam.

Remember, the public health recommendations for a phased return to work may shift frequently. Be sure to adhere to best practices along the way, and always hire reputable companies to perform any of the work listed above. There is no one size fits all. Each company is unique in protecting employees, customers, and the environment. If you check off these items, however, you will make great strides towards resuming operations.

One last word of advice: Involve all your employees in the collective return to work to increase their comfort level. Consider selecting an employee as your Office Health Point Person who is responsible for ordering and restocking PPE and other supplies for your business. Ask your workers to clean their individual space when they arrive and leave each day. “In this way,” Shari says, “they will know they've done their part for themselves, and for the greater good.”

With thanks to Julie Greenfield, [Stella Group](#); Anne Wilkinson, [EF Contract](#); Kelly Victor Burke, [Burke Architectural Millwork](#); and Stacy Bishop, [NamaStacyb](#), for their contributions and insights.



Shari Stein, the owner/partner of Birmingham-based DesignTeam Plus, is an interior designer whose professional practice encompasses sustainable and universal design. She has lent her expertise in and out of the classroom, lecturing on best practices in the design of industrial, commercial, residential, and nonprofit entities. *Learn more at* <https://designteamplus.com> or call 248-559-1000.