

Research to Action:
**Building Health for All[®]
in the Face of COVID-19**

CHAPTER 2

Building Trust in the Workplace

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In the face of COVID-19, real estate professionals, designers, and other decision makers are urgently requesting guidance on how to adapt their projects and portfolios to respond to the unique challenges presented by the pandemic. The Center for Active Design has prepared the following content to respond to this demand, using the best available evidence to date.

As the scientific evidence base around COVID-19 continues to evolve, we will update this material periodically to reflect emerging findings. Your feedback is appreciated—please reach out to covid19@fitwel.org with comments, questions, and insights for future updates.

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Research to Action: Building Health for All® in the Face of COVID-19

The global spread of COVID-19 has heightened awareness of the pressing importance of Fitwel's mission of building health for all. With people around the world spending an increasing amount of time indoors and in their local neighborhoods, the spaces where we live, work, study, and play have shifted dramatically. As we move through our collective response to COVID-19 and begin to recover, a new normal will emerge to create a more resilient society—and the buildings and public places we inhabit will play a critical role in this shift.

At the Center for Active Design, we are committed to ensuring our users and community have access to up-to-date resources that directly reflect the latest available health evidence. As part of this effort we will be sharing a series of resources to help guide building owners, property managers, designers, and employers as they respond to COVID-19 now and into the future. The five resources will focus on the following topics:

- 1. Leveraging Buildings to Mitigate Viral Transmission.** This resource will provide an overview of the basics of viral transmission, as well as strategies to mitigate transmission—including limiting physical interactions, handwashing, regular cleaning, ventilation, filtration, and humidity.
- 2. Building Trust in the Workplace.** This resource will provide guidance for cultivating employee and tenant trust, and enhancing perceptions of safety once office buildings are ready to re-open. We will cover topics, including but not limited to, emergency preparedness, communication, surveying, and signage.
- 3. Mental Health and COVID-19.** This resource will focus on the importance of considering mental health during crises, and how home environments can be optimized to promote feelings of well-being. Strategies covered will include greenery, outdoor spaces, high quality indoor air, sleep environments, and health-promotion programming.
- 4. Density and Resiliency.** This resource will focus on how density can contribute to resiliency and public health, concentrating on a number of areas, including energy savings, affordable housing, diversity, public transit, sustainability, active transportation, and healthcare.
- 5. Chronic Disease, Equity, and COVID-19.** This resource will explore the interconnected relationships between COVID-19, the social determinants of health, and chronic disease. Topics covered will include healthcare access, food access, housing quality, job roles, among others. This resource will also dig into specific strategies that can help address many of the inequities associated with negative COVID-19 outcomes, such as pollution, food environments, access to outdoor space, and community resiliency.

These resources are designed to contribute to an ever-evolving conversation, and we will stay abreast of new science as the research base expands. We are all in this together, and we look forward to continued collaboration to discover the best ways to meet the challenge of COVID-19.

CHAPTER 2

Building Trust in the Workplace

Countries around the world are all at different stages in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While offices across China are beginning to reopen, experts are predicting that it will be months before the United States is ready to fully bring employees now working remotely back into the office environment.¹ Despite these different timelines, businesses globally are grappling with how to ensure their employee's safety once they are able to return to the office. And these questions are not just about physical safety, but also psychological perceptions of security. Specifically, what will it take for employees to see their workplaces as safe spaces to spend 8+ hours a day.

As commercial building owners plan for the future, many are looking to residential property owners and managers for guidance and insights on how they have enhanced resident confidence and perceptions of safety in the midst of COVID-19.

Workplaces can support mental health by building trust

The uncertainty and the daily disruptions associated with COVID-19 have had a significant impact on population mental health. According to a poll conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation from March 25-30, the mental health impacts are intensifying as COVID-19 continues to impact daily life in the United States. More than 4 in 10 (45%) of adults feel that worry and stress related to COVID-19 has had a negative impact on their mental health.² Similar trends were seen in the wake of the SARS where high percentages of those living in Hong Kong felt helpless, horrified, and apprehensive because of SARS and perceived increased stress in family or work settings.³ These findings suggest that employers must be hyper-focused on employee mental health as offices re-open.

Maximizing employee trust in their employers as a way to reduce stress in the workplace will be vital to facilitate a safe and smooth return back to the office.

This will mean something different for all employers, but there are some common truths that will be critical to consider. According to the 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer, 66% of the world's population do not have confidence that current leaders will be able to successfully address their country's challenges, with CEO's and government leaders earning some of the lowest trust rankings at 51% and 42% respectively.⁴ One key finding from this report is that businesses, NGOs, and governments are all able to build trust through partnership – a valuable learning for all sectors as they strive to build employee confidence.⁵

This resource will provide evidence-based guidance focused on buildings, for building owners, property managers, and employers looking to build employee trust and perceptions of safety once ready to re-open office buildings.



More than 4 in 10 (45%) of adults feel that worry and stress related to COVID-19 has had a negative impact on their mental health.

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation. (2020). Poll findings: the impact of coronavirus on life in America. Retrieved from <https://www.kff.org/health%20reform/report/kff-health-tracking-poll-early-april-2020/>



66% of the world's population do not have confidence that current leaders will be able to successfully address their country's challenges.

Source: Edelman. (2020). Edelman Trust Barometer 2020. Edelman. Retrieved from <https://www.edelman.com/trustbarometer>

Strategies to Build Employee Confidence in Workplace Safety

Perception of risk and levels of trust are interrelated. Studies suggest that increased trust of those in control is associated with a perception of reduced risk. Also, when individuals perceive something as highly risky, they may be slower to place trust in others. This is especially true when a situation isn't fully understood.⁶ One study explains, "In the context of various risks, if knowledge is missing, trust is used to assess the benefits and the risks associated with a hazard."⁷ Given that our knowledge around COVID-19 is continuing to evolve, the connection between risk perception and trust is evident in the varied psychological responses to changes associated with the virus. Each individual is doing a unique set of personal calculus when deciding to leave their home, whether heading to their essential job, the grocery store, or a walk around their neighborhood.

These personal perceptions will only become more evident once commercial buildings reopen and companies begin requesting employees report to the office. By creating environments that help occupants feel safe and secure, building owners, facility managers, and employers will have an opportunity to not only enhance mental health but also positively impact productivity.

The strategies listed below are ordered based on strength of evidence and predicted impact on employee trust within the workplace.

Communication

Increase communication to enhance transparency

Transparent communications, defined as information substantiality, accountability, and employee participation has been shown to support employee trust.⁸ This is especially true during times of uncertainty and crisis, when effective risk communication is necessary. Evaluations suggest that risk communication can provide

vital knowledge for informed decision making, build or rebuild trust among stakeholders, and engage stakeholders to resolve disputes and build consensus.⁹ The power of communication underscores the need for tenant-building owner communication during this period, to ensure all occupants are receiving the necessary information.

In support of enhanced communication between building owners and tenants, Fitwel has released a Building Owner-Tenant Collaboration Tool designed to clarify how building owners and tenants can work together and leverage Fitwel to support occupant health. [Click here](#) to access this tool.



Communication should be transmitted through a variety of mediums, to ensure occupant awareness. Without communicating the steps being taken within a building to promote

safety and health of occupants, the building owner and/or tenant lose out on the vital mental health impacts of these efforts.

So, how exactly can these efforts be communicated?



Building-wide newsletters. Sharing regular updates that explain cleaning practices, building policy updates, and the implementation of new filtration or ventilation systems will help support employees through these changes and decrease the likelihood that any employees feel caught off guard.



Webinars. Scheduling regular webinars to walk building occupants through new pandemic preparedness plan or share occupant satisfaction survey results will foster occupant involvement, promoting feelings of inclusion and trust.



Workplace Signage. Implementing workplace signage is a fast and simple way to increase awareness and increase compliance with new policies.

For more ideas on how communication can be leveraged within the workplace, see the section on how to [Encourage New Workplace Norms](#), under Areas for Continued Exploration.

Cleaning and Maintenance Practices

Increase order through rigorous cleaning and maintenance practices

In the midst of COVID-19 mitigating signs of disorder is especially important when it comes to building trust in both residential neighborhoods as well as within the workplace.

According to research conducted as a part of CfAD's Assembly initiative, signs of disorder, such as poorly maintained greenery and presence of litter are associated with decreased civic trust, evidenced by diminished trust in authority figures and fellow community members as well as lower community pride.

In general neighborhood greenery is associated with enhanced civic trust, but maintenance of that greenery is essential. People with well-maintained public greenery on their block have significantly higher levels of civic trust than those with poorly maintained greenery. In addition, greenery in poor condition is a liability and is associated with worse civic trust than having no greenery at all. A similar situation can apply to biophilic design in the workplace. While biophilia is associated with enhanced mental health, those benefits won't be realized if the indoor greenery isn't well maintained.¹⁰ For example, a wilting potted plant is not going to do anything to benefit

workplace trust, and could even have a detrimental impact.

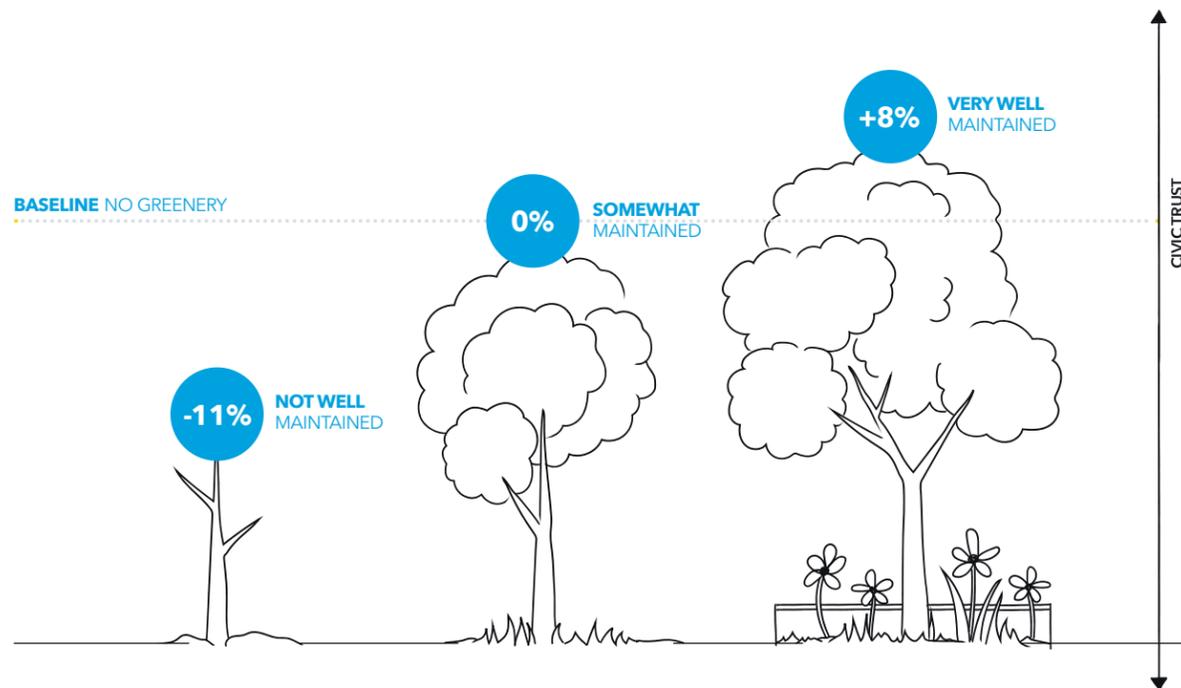
In addition, compared to respondents who say their streets are never cleaned, those who reported high frequency of street cleaning express greater civic trust (+15%), participation (+10%), stewardship (+10%), and local voting (+6%). In addition, those who say litter is "very common" in their neighborhood exhibit lower levels of civic trust across a range of measures, including, community pride, trust in local government to maintain public spaces, and belief that community members care about one another.¹¹

Given the inverse relationship between disorder and trust, it stands to reason that within the workplace, maintaining a clean environment will be vital. Cleaning has been shown to play a vital role in mitigating viral

transmission, and in the wake of the outbreak of SARS in 2003, supporting a culture of safety in the workplace emerged as a necessity, and a big part of that strategy was maintaining a clean environment.¹² As a part of maintaining a clean environment, restocking of personal hygiene supplies, such as soap, paper towels, and toilet paper will be essential in order to increase occupant satisfaction and support perceptions of safety within the workplace. Cleaning practices should also be communicated to occupants to increase awareness and transparency.

Comprehensive details on best practices for cleaning protocols can be found in the Leveraging Buildings to Mitigate Viral Transmission resource."

For more information on effective cleaning practices, visit the [CDC](#).



Evaluations of Building Occupants Needs and Expectations

Discern occupant needs and expectations through post-occupancy evaluations

Surveying provides occupants and key stakeholders with an opportunity to share their input and voice their concerns, which can be especially useful and empowering during a time of uncertainty. Post-Occupancy Evaluations (POE) help to discern how a building is or isn't meeting occupants' needs and expectations, through a variety of tools, including interviews, surveys, discussion groups, and observation.¹³

The POE process actively involves building occupants, which can help improve overall attitudes about the workplace.¹⁴ In addition, these evaluations can highlight any unknown concerns for the facility management team, such as uncontrolled leakage, poor air circulation, confusing signage, or lacking communication.

Based on the survey responses, additional follow-up may be needed to determine how to move forward based on the new knowledge. For example, while occupants might have concerns about indoor air quality, building staff may know that they have implemented high levels of filtration and/or substantial ventilation rates to address. In this case, building staff may realize there is a lapse in communication rather than a need to revamp the HVAC system.

Analyses also suggest that quality assurance programs, such as occupant surveying can increase occupant confidence.¹⁵ Studies suggest that occupant surveys have become a vital part of the POE process, indicating the importance of occupant perceptions.¹⁶

Some specific questions that may be helpful to ask occupants before and/or after they return to the office include the following:

I feel safe working in the office 8 hours per day.

- (1) Strongly disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither agree nor disagree (4) Agree (5) Strongly agree

I feel confident in the cleaning practices within the building.

- (1) Strongly disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither agree nor disagree (4) Agree (5) Strongly agree

In thinking about returning to the workplace, I am most nervous about which of the following:

- (1) Indoor air quality (2) Close quarters (3) Cleaning protocols
 (4) Availability of supplies (soap, paper towels, etc.) to support employee hygiene
 (5) Others coming to work while sick

Emergency Preparedness + Pandemic Planning

Integrate pandemic preparedness into emergency preparedness plans

Successfully responding to any kind of emergency requires planning for the unexpected. Putting preparedness plans in place is a preventative step that can protect the physical, mental, and social health of occupants and employees. Each emergency requires a unique set of actions, and when it comes to pandemics, building owners, property managers, and employers play a key role in ensuring their occupants and employees feel secure and know how to respond appropriately.

A recent article written in response to COVID-19 argues that a pandemic preparedness plan is an essential part of any business continuity plan - something many of us have witnessed firsthand.¹⁷ As companies talk about reopening offices, they are realizing the importance of pandemic preparedness, especially when it comes to developing a tenant reintegration plan. In addition, this kind of planning is considered a best practice in infection control.¹⁸

The World Health Organization (WHO) first introduced the need for pandemic planning in 1999, and it wasn't until 2003 that they called for the development of national and global pandemic plans. The guidance from the WHO is understandably largely focused on governmental agencies and first responders, meaning that commercial building owners,

operators, and investors have had limited guidance on how to prepare to reopen their corporate real estate portfolios in situations like the one we are currently facing. However, the learnings from essential workplaces, including grocery stores, supply chain warehouses, hospitals, government agencies, among others, can help guide best practices for commercial building owners, property managers, and employers as office workers slowly head back to the workplace.

Although each workplace will have unique needs depending on location and context, many commercial office buildings will encounter similar concerns when it comes to both ensuring occupant safety as well as strengthening perceptions of security. Based on the available evidence the keys to a successful Pandemic Prepared Plan seem to be involving all key stakeholders, establishing common goals, and practicing clear communication.¹⁹ When it comes to commercial spaces, a successful Pandemic Preparedness Plan requires collaboration between building owners and tenants, as each group will have unique responsibilities when it comes to implementation.

A comprehensive pandemic preparedness plan should include items regarding infection control, operations during the pandemic, legal considerations, and communication guidelines.

Additional Resources:

- [The Institute of Real Estate Management's Pandemic Guide for Real Estate Managers](#)
- [BOMA International's COVID-19 Preparedness Checklist](#)
- [NIH Chapter on Pandemics: Risks, Impacts, and Mitigation](#)
- [WHO Guidelines](#) for pandemic preparedness and response in the non-health sector



TrioVest has developed a comprehensive COVID-19 Tenant Reintegration Playbook, which outlines how they will deliver across five key pillars:

- Assess tenant needs proactively
- Prepare and train site teams
- Prepare and maintain the building
- Ensure access control, distancing and flow
- Provide clear and frequent communication

Fitwel Strategies to Address Trust

Fitwel is the world's leading certification system committed to building health for all®. Fitwel includes several strategies associated with increased feelings of well-being and enhanced trust, which you can find listed below. For more details and to download Fitwel Scorecards, visit Fitwel.org/resources.



MF: Multifamily Residential **WP:** Workplace Scorecard **RT:** Retail Scorecard
CS: Commercial Sites

Indoor Air Quality Policy

(MF 6.3, WP 6.3, RT 6.3)

Fitwel's Indoor Air Quality Policy strategy features requirements designed to promote high quality indoor air and support prevention of aerosol transmission, which can help increase occupant confidence in transmission risk.

Indoor Air Quality Testing

(MF 6.4, WP 6.4, RT 6.4)

Fitwel's Indoor Air Quality Testing strategy features requirements around particulate matter levels, encouraging high quality HVAC systems. In addition, testing requires a relative humidity of between 30-60% promoting higher indoor humidity while limiting mold growth. Testing the adherence to these performance metrics can help enhance employee confidence and demonstrate workplace commitment to maintaining high quality indoor air.

Indoor Air Quality Testing Results

(MF 6.5, WP 6.5, RT 6.5)

Fitwel's Indoor Air Quality Testing Results strategy requires projects to share annual indoor air quality testing or monitoring results with all regular occupants through a digital platform or annual communication materials. Communication of these results can help increase occupant awareness of the efforts being taken by their workplace to enhance human health.

MF: Multifamily Residential **WP:** Workplace Scorecard **RT:** Retail Scorecard

CS: Commercial Sites

Cleaning Protocol in Break Areas

(WP 8.4, RT 8.4, CS 8.1)

Fitwel's Regular Cleaning Protocol strategy targeting break area cleanliness requires regular cleaning of high touch surfaces such as counters, tables, sinks, and appliances, including refrigerators, freezers, microwaves, and coffee machines. The requirements also address restocking needs for hand soap, dish soap, and sponges. Ensuring break areas are cleaned regularly and properly stocked can help decrease fomite transmission of a virus and demonstrate a property's commitment to mitigating disease transmission.

Cleaning Protocol in Bathrooms

(WP 8.1, RT 8.1, CS 8.1)

Fitwel's Regular Cleaning Protocol strategy targeting bathroom cleanliness requires regular cleaning of high touch surfaces such as counters and bathroom fixtures, including sinks and toilets. The requirements also address restocking needs for soap, toilet paper, and paper towels. Ensuring bathrooms are cleaned regularly and properly stocked can help decrease fomite transmission of a virus.

Educational Hand-Washing Signage

(WP 8.2, RT 8.2)

Fitwel's Educational Hand-Washing Signage strategy requires bathrooms to include permanent hand-washing signage that includes educational language around the health benefits of hand-washing. Signage promoting hand-washing and explaining its unique benefits has been shown to encourage proper hand-washing technique, such as making sure to wash hands for a full 20 seconds. This becomes increasingly important during times of disease spread, and can help build occupant trust in the hygiene of others within the space.

Health Promotion Programming

(WP 8.11, RT 8.12, MF 8.8, CS 7.4)

Fitwel's health promotion programming strategy can be leveraged to address COVID-19 through programs designed to raise awareness around new research, best practices, and prevention strategies emerging in light of COVID-19.

MF: Multifamily Residential **WP:** Workplace Scorecard **RT:** Retail Scorecard

CS: Commercial Sites

Occupant Satisfaction Survey

(WP 8.12, RT 8.13, MF 8.9, CS 8.3)

Fitwel's Occupant Satisfaction Survey strategy provides occupants with an opportunity to share feedback on the design and operations of their workplace, which can contribute to empowerment, and guide changes made in response to COVID-19.

Stakeholder Collaboration Process

(WP 8.13, RT 8.14, MF 8.10, CS 7.3)

Fitwel's Stakeholder Collaboration Process strategy establishes a framework to engage and prioritize stakeholders' health concerns. By bringing together the building owner, building management, employees, tenants, suppliers, and even community organizations, a property is better able to respond to the needs of those using the space and respond appropriately to concerns around COVID-19.

Emergency Preparedness Plan

Fitwel's Emergency Preparedness Plan strategy requires projects to develop a comprehensive plan for how to respond to potential emergency situations, such as a pandemic. Developing a Pandemic Preparedness plan that meets Fitwel's requirements can help support workplace resiliency and enhance communication during times of crisis.



Addressing Frequently Asked Questions

This section is aimed at beginning to answer questions we have received repeatedly from Fitwel users regarding best practice for building trust in the workplace, once ready to re-open. The tactics you will find below are those that we have asked about that aren't currently included in the Fitwel Certification System. We will continue to explore these areas, and while some may prove effective and be included within future versions of Fitwel, others may prove ineffective when it comes to health promotion.

Encourage New Workplace Norms

How can workplaces encourage new norms to support employee safety?

While office workers will not be working remotely indefinitely, until a COVID-19 vaccine is developed, new policies will need to be enacted to ensure employee safety and build trust. Public health projections developed in the midst of the COVID-19 predicted that physical distancing had the potential to reduce peak healthcare demand by two-thirds and COVID-19 deaths by 50%.²⁰ While we have yet to know exactly how many lives were saved thanks to social distancing, the flattening of the curve around the world indicates the strategy's efficacy.

We have all witnessed the significant impacts of physical distancing, but how can these learnings be integrated once office workers head back into the workplace?

The research addressing what new workplaces could and should look like is still emerging, and at this point we are all still learning. As the scientific data around COVID-19

transmission continues to evolve, effective communication around physical distancing practices and other safety protocols will be essential to fostering tenant wellbeing. Such strategies could include:

- Reducing occupancy in commercial spaces and workplaces by setting up systems to stagger employee or tenant start times
- Supporting telework
- Providing building staff with paid sick leave and communicating this to occupants.

Paid Sick Leave Policies

Can paid sick leave policies increase occupant and employee confidence?

Presenteeism, or going to work while sick, can decrease employee productivity and also put other employees at risk. Providing paid sick leave is essential for employers looking to reduce workplace transmission of COVID-19. Sick-leave policies have been shown to reduce transmission of influenza within the workplace. In a simulated influenza epidemic with a reproductive rate of 1.4, the attack rate among employees associated with workplace transmission was 11.54%. More than 70% of this transmission resulted from exposure to employees who showed up to work sick, suggesting that paid sick leave is vital. One study found that universal paid sick days reduced workplace infections by 5.86%. In addition, providing 1

Providing 1 or 2 paid sick days, specifically for the flu reduced workplace infections by 25.33% and 39.22%, respectively.

or 2 paid sick days specifically for the **flu**, reduced workplace infections by 25.33% and 39.22%, respectively. PSDs reduce influenza transmission owing to presenteeism and, hence, the burden of influenza illness in workplaces.²¹

Fever Screening

Is fever screening at workplaces an effective way to address COVID-19 and increase occupant confidence?

A preliminary review of the research indicates that fever screening on its own will likely miss a significant portion of the population in identifying COVID-19 infections. In terms of thermal screening technology, infrared thermoscanners may be useful for identifying fever-related disease. However, the efficacy depends on the implementation, and the evidence suggests that fever screen may be useful as one part of an integrated approach when followed by screening for other risk factors.²²

Fever screening on its own will likely miss a significant portion of the population in identifying COVID-19 infections.

The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes that temperature screening alone at travel points of entry may not be effective as it could miss those who are asymptomatic.²³ The WHO also notes that if temperature screening is implemented, it should be done so

with other screening methods, such as health messages, primary questionnaires, and data collection and analysis, as well as a plan for how to proceed when suspected cases are detected.²⁴ Fever is a non-specific symptom, especially in diseases like COVID-19 where symptoms are often delayed due to a longer incubation period (the period between exposure to an infection and the appearance of the first symptoms).

While thermal screening is a valid technology, the purpose is not to be interpreted as a medical or clinical screening. It is not intended to diagnose, but rather to minimize risk and maximize confidence. As such, the technology may be useful in providing confidence to building occupants and visitors. The current evidence on fever screening underscores the point that the percentage of asymptomatic cases remains a crucial unknown, which significantly impacts screening effectiveness.²⁵ With this in mind, building owners and facility managers must consider the potential for fever screening to backfire, if transmission does ultimately occur within the workplace.

Hand Sanitizing Stations

How can providing additional opportunities to sanitize hands in commercial buildings affect occupant trust?

Evidence suggests that improved hand hygiene can reduce infectious disease transmission in the workplace. One way to positively influence hand hygiene is by providing additional opportunities for occupants to use hand sanitizer.²⁶ BOMA recommends integrating hand

Increasing access to hand sanitizer within the workplace has the potential to not only improve hand hygiene, but also demonstrate company concern for employee well-being.

sanitizing stations into highly trafficked areas and near high-touch surfaces. Some examples include, entrances/exits, lobbies, kitchens, stairwells, and fitness centers, among others. Increasing access to hand sanitizer within the workplace has the potential to not only improve hand hygiene, but also demonstrate company concern for employee well-being. One study based on employee survey data found that a multi-modal hand hygiene intervention, which involved strategically placing hand sanitizing stations around the workplace resulted in increased employee workplace satisfaction.²⁷ This straightforward intervention has the potential to increase employee confidence and put occupants at ease.

This resource is designed to contribute to the ever-evolving conversation around how buildings can support the fight against COVID-19. We will continue to review new research as it emerges and incorporate into our work as appropriate. Please reach out to us at covid19@fitwel.org with any specific questions.

** Disclaimer:

- Research on COVID-19 is currently in its very initial stages and new evidence is constantly emerging. New evidence will be added as our team analyzes, and will be incorporated into our messaging.
- Because COVID-19 is such a new disease, many of the research articles included below reference the transmission of other viruses.
- We are contributing to this public health discussion, providing ideas and generating conversation, not necessarily providing foolproof solutions.
- We are continuing to collaborate with thought leaders and discovering the best ways to meet this challenge together.
- None of this should be taken as medical advice, and individuals should consult with their doctors if they are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.

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