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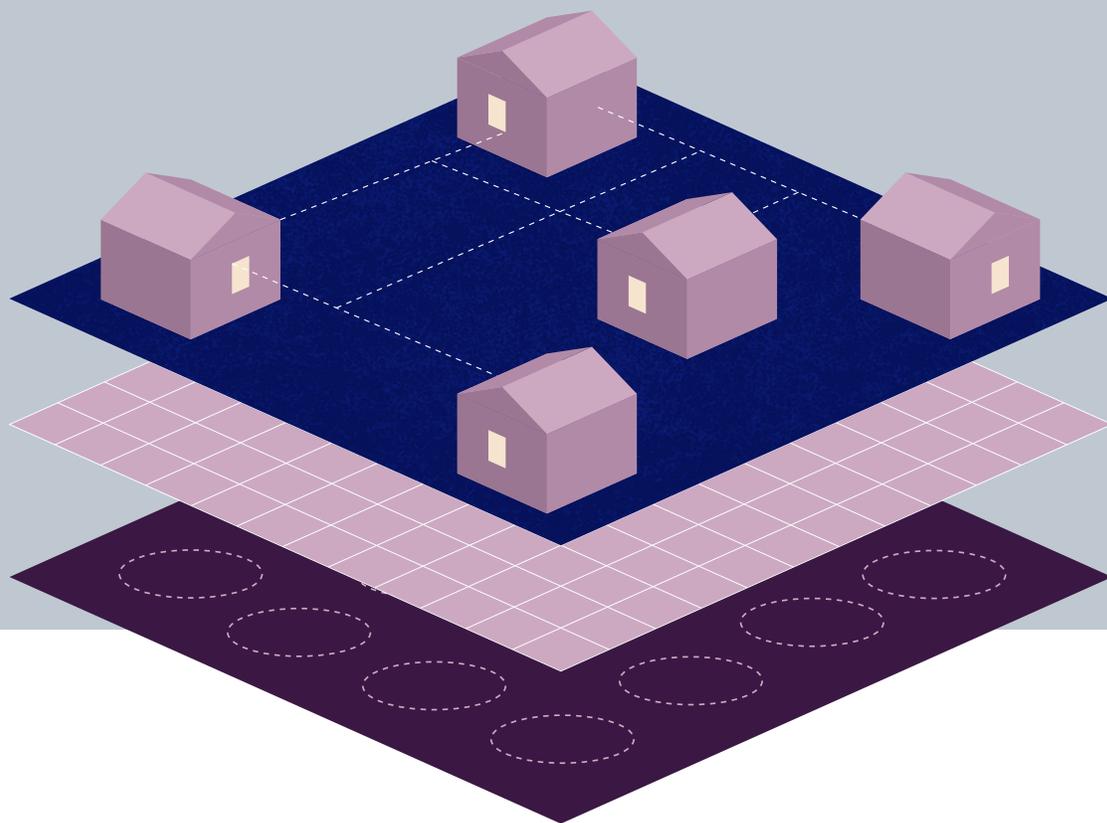
Embracing a New Reality

Workplace strategy insights for COVID-19 and beyond

If you are like most of our customers, you're likely beginning to formulate plans for re-opening your physical workplaces. Questions like, "How do we stagger reentry?" and "How will safety measures impact productivity?" may be top of mind. We're learning the answers to these questions right alongside you as we devise our own tactics for returning to the office.

In the executive summary of our full research report, we're sharing what we're learning from the current crisis and offering science-based recommendations to help shape your short-term, return-to-workplace tactics. Together, we can build resilience for the dynamic future of work.

What factors should you consider as people return to the workplace?

While there is no one-size-fits-all solution—and guidance will change as scientific findings and regulations evolve—we're offering insights to inform your near-term, return-to-work tactics.

Prioritize Holistic Community Measures

Holistic policies like staggering work schedules and limiting the number of employees in a location will be the most effective tactics as your employees return to the workplace.

Study How People Move Throughout Your Space

Consider the overall flow of your space to understand the design measures you need to take to keep people at safe physical distance. Use Lean thinking to help you visualize people's movements and make adjustments for safety and efficiency.

Don't Immediately Default to Adding Screens

Don't keep caught up in the screen hype. While they are important at check-out counters, the science on whether or not they can prevent infection spread in the workplace is inconclusive.

Use Data to Decide Who Goes Back First

An anonymous survey—such as the Leesman Homeworking Assessment—can help you determine which teams can continue working at home and which should return to the workplace.

Support Teams Working Remotely

Provide the ergonomic furniture and technology platforms people need to be productive while working from home. And make sure your workplace is outfitted for collaboration with remote colleagues.

Overcommunicate with Employees

Use your internal social networks to engage employees in dialogues, and use surveys to do regular 'pulse checks' to see how people are feeling as they return to the office.

Physical Controls

– Reduce in-person interaction.

– Limit or stop desk sharing.

– Implement a rigorous reservation and desk cleaning regimen.

– Make it mandatory for people to wear cloth face coverings.

– Allow people to work from home as much as possible.

– Require people to wash hands.

– Require people to stay home when sick.

Design and Environmental Controls

– Reduce density.

– Consider physical barriers where necessary.*

– Increase ventilation rates and percentage of circulating outdoor air.

– Clean/sanitize regularly.

– Use disinfectants such as bleach.

Administrative Controls

– Redistribute responsibilities to reduce contact between individuals.

– Use technology to facilitate communication.

– Implement flexible work hours.

– Implement flexible meeting options.

– Close facilities in accordance with government guidelines.

*Guidelines from Johns Hopkins and the American Enterprise Institute (AEI)

What design considerations can help people work safely?

Explore Workplace Scenarios

Workplace scenario planning is a useful tool that can help you create a phased return-to-workplace strategy for your employees. While every situation will be different, these layout examples give you options to consider for keeping people six feet or two meters apart as they work.

Stagger Desk Assignments

– Alternating days
– No desk sharing
– Less density per day
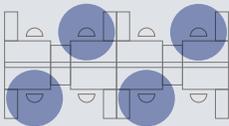
Benching
8 person to 4 person

Shift Ancillary Space To Overflow Workpoints

– Shift to an overflow workpoint
– Alternate spaces for video conferencing

Collaborative Space
Shift to individual workpoint
8 to 2 seats

● Seat can be occupied—six-foot or two-meter diameter

Use Data to Inform Workplace Decisions

Space utilization data is one of your most useful tools when deciding who should return to the workplace and how you should reallocate space. Consider a tool like Live Platform^{SM}, a smart office system that uses sensors to gather real-time data on how and when your people are using the workplace.
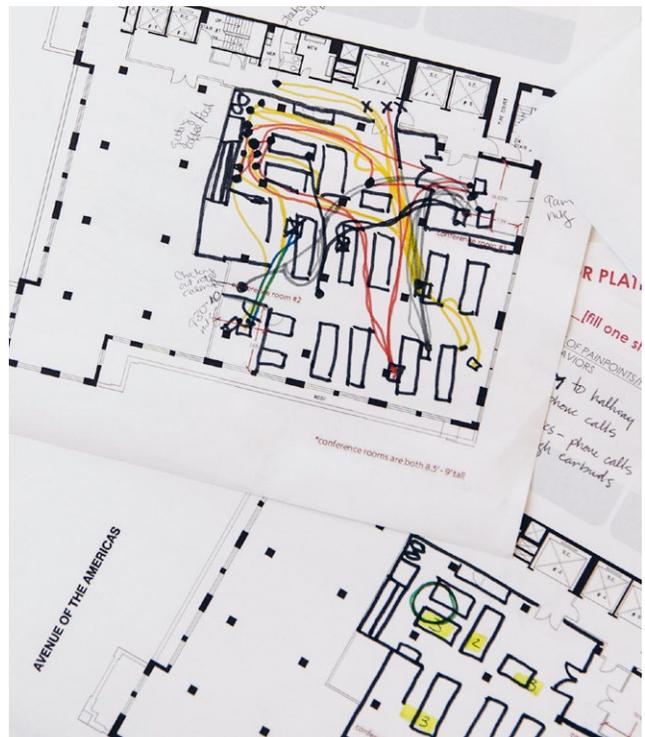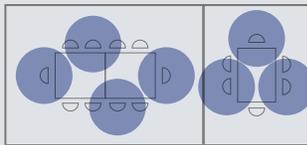
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Make the Most of Your Meeting Rooms

Given the need to keep people six feet or two meters apart, many organizations are making most meetings virtual. Consider how you might use or repurpose those rooms moving forward using the following design interventions.

Prioritize Circulation Space and Sanitizing Stations

Adding sanitizer and hand-washing stations will be critical as your people return to the workplace. Convert unused meeting rooms to serve this purpose. Also assess your circulation space to locate sanitizer in convenient places.

Reduce Occupancy of Enclosed Spaces

– No furniture changes
– May require chair storage

Meeting Room A
10 seats to 4 seats
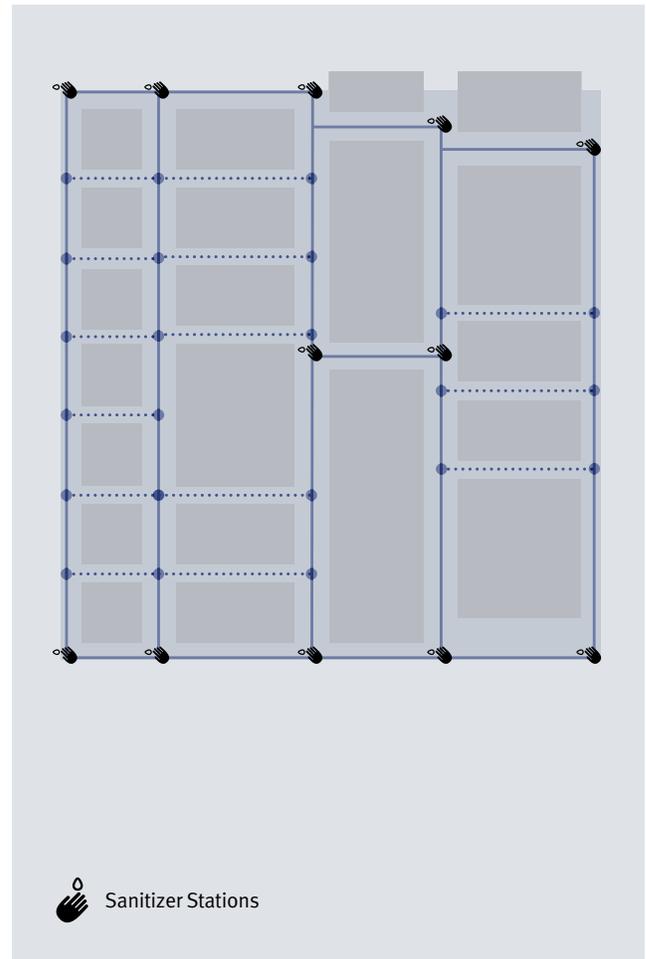
Meeting Room B
6 seats to 3 seats

10:09am

Scheduled Cleaning Protocol
Between each meeting

⬤ Seat can be occupied–six-foot or two-meter diameter

🖐 Sanitizer Stations

We're Here to Help

Herman Miller is uniquely equipped to take a long view of the future and help you face unexpected changes with confidence. We have over 70 years of research and insight into human needs and behaviors to bolster us, and we're learning new things every day.

If you'd like to download the full report and explore more helpful ideas for managing your workplace during the current crisis and beyond, visit hermanmiller.com/covid-19/.