

Massachusetts Releases Mandatory Workplace Safety Standards in Preparation for Phased Business Reopening

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On May 11, 2020, Massachusetts released a set of mandatory safety standards that will apply to businesses as they begin to open their doors in the coming weeks pursuant to the Commonwealth's four-phased plan. The workplace safety standards, which were developed by the Department of Health and COVID-19 Command Center, are designed to limit the spread of COVID-19 and will apply to all industries that are permitted to reopen in the first phase of the plan.

The standards focus on four areas: (1) social distancing; (2) hygiene; (3) staffing and operations; and (4) cleaning and disinfecting. The standards for each of the four areas are detailed below:

Social Distancing:

- All persons, including employees, customers, and vendors, should remain at least 6 feet apart to the greatest extent possible, both inside and outside workplaces.
- Establish protocols to ensure that employees can practice adequate social distancing.
- Provide signage for safe social distancing.
- Require face coverings or masks for all employees.

Hygiene:

- Provide hand-washing capabilities throughout the workplace.
- Ensure frequent hand-washing by employees and adequate supplies to do so.
- Provide regular sanitization of high touch areas, such as workstations, equipment, screens, doorknobs and restrooms throughout work site.

Staffing and Operations:

- Provide training for employees regarding the social distancing and hygiene protocols.
- Employees who are displaying COVID-19-like symptoms do not report to work.
- Establish a plan for employees getting ill from COVID-19 at work and a return-to-work plan.

Cleaning and Disinfecting:

- Establish and maintain cleaning protocols specific to the business.
- When an active employee is diagnosed with COVID-19, cleaning and disinfecting must be performed.
- Disinfection of all common surfaces must take place at intervals appropriate to said workplace.

Massachusetts officials have emphasized that these safety standards are crucial to the Commonwealth's phased reopening plan. If the safety standards are not properly implemented by businesses and the spread of coronavirus significantly increases as businesses reopens, the plan could be derailed.

The Commonwealth's reopening plan is expected to be released in greater detail on May 18, at which point Massachusetts employers learn what businesses will be permitted to open in first phase of the reopening plan. In the meantime, Massachusetts businesses should start planning to comply with the safety standards, including by creating their own policies, procedures, and protocols, procuring the necessary supplies, and physically adapting their work environments.

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