

Phase I guidelines for: Governmental organizations

Consistent with guidelines and regulations for all employers in Rhode Island, governmental organizations and governmental entities (hereinafter referred to as governmental organizations) should prepare and implement a plan for resuming services in a phased approach in accordance with guidelines established below. For the first phase, a comprehensive plan includes the following elements:

- Physical space and occupancy limits.
- Processes and procedures to maintain safe operations.
- Communications and human resources materials to inform staff of new procedures and restrictions.
- A plan for sourcing and maintaining the additional supplies necessary to continue operations during the remainder of the pandemic.

If you have questions, please contact Neil Hytinen at 222-1625 or Neil.Hytinen@health.ri.gov.

I. Summary of Phase I operations

Under Phase I of Rhode Island's economic re-opening plan, some business, government, and social activity will resume on a limited basis while significant restrictions remain in place to protect public health and safety. Social distancing, employee and visitor screening, and a strict cleaning regimen should be utilized.

Governmental organizations must plan to adopt practices compliant with newly promulgated State rules and regulations of the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) and the Rhode Island Department of Business Regulation (DBR), as well as recent executive orders and with any sector-specific regulations.

- Emergency rules and regulations promulgated by RIDOH can be accessed online at: <https://health.ri.gov/covid/>.
- A full list of executive orders can be found at: <https://governor.ri.gov/newsroom/orders/>.
- Emergency rules and regulations promulgated by DBR can be accessed online at: <https://dbr.ri.gov/covid/covid19updates.php>.
- Sector-specific guidance for business re-opening under Phase I, such as retail specific guidance, can be found at <https://www.reopeningri.com/>.

The guidelines below offer governmental organizations general guidance that should be considered the minimum to help protect their employees, customers, and residents of the state.

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II. Physical space and occupancy limits

All organizations should follow the regulations issued by RIDOH and guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding gathering sizes and social distancing:

Adhere to gathering size restrictions

- Governmental organizations must comply with the RIDOH regulations on gathering sizes, found [here](#), and active executive orders, found [here](#).
- These restrictions should be followed when holding meetings, conferences, or other social gatherings.
- Governmental organizations are asked to adapt activities, including those required by city or town charters, that would require group sizes larger than RIDOH requirements for gathering sizes.

Apply social distancing measures

- All persons should remain at least six (6) feet apart at all times. If social distancing is not feasible, individuals must minimize time in violation of social distancing, and additional precautions should be taken. Procedures that cannot be executed with social distancing should be documented by the governmental organization in the written COVID-19 Control Plan required under section III of this document.
- All persons must wear a mask in accordance with RIDOH regulations, found [here](#), and active executive orders, found [here](#). Further information on face masks can be found in later sections of this document.
- The CDC has published the following social distancing guidance: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>.

III. Business processes, procedures and activities

All governmental organizations operating under Phase I should have established cleaning, health screening, and sick leave procedures.

- Governmental organizations must develop a written **COVID-19 Control Plan** outlining how their workplace will prevent the spread of COVID-19 that includes procedures that meet, at a minimum, the requirements of the RIDOH regulations posted [here](#) and the following elements:
 - Social distancing procedures;
 - Procedures for ensuring wearing of face coverings;
 - Procedures for decontamination of surfaces;
 - Procedures for responding to a positive case or outbreak. Each organization should have a plan to ensure that employees who are required to isolate based on a positive test for COVID-19, or are required to quarantine as a result of exposure, can stay out of the workplace until cleared to return; and
 - Procedures for minimizing access to the establishment by COVID-19-positive or symptomatic individuals.
- A template for a written COVID-19 Control Plan can be found at: <http://www.reopeningri.com/>.

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- Governmental organizations must make the written plan (or the filled-out template) available to employees at an area within the premises that is accessible to employees and should ensure employees are aware of their role in implementing relevant procedures and protocols.
- This plan **does not** need to be submitted to a State agency for approval but must be made available to RIDOH in the event of an inspection or outbreak.
- Governmental organizations must place posters educating employees, customers, and visitors about how to protect themselves in accordance with RIDOH regulations found here: <https://health.ri.gov/covid/>.
 - Posters must be placed at entrances and in common areas (such as bathrooms).
- A list of acceptable posters available for download can be found at: <https://health.ri.gov/covid/for/business/>.

Enhanced Cleaning and/or Disinfecting Procedures

Enhanced cleaning and disinfecting procedures must be implemented.

Cleaning refers to the removal of germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces. Although not designed to kill germs but instead remove them from a surface, most cleaning products can "kill" coronaviruses by removing the fatty outer layer they use to infect cells.

Disinfecting refers to using a chemical designed to kill germs on surfaces. This process does not necessarily clean dirty surfaces or remove germs, but by killing any remaining germs on a surface after cleaning, it can further lower the risk of spreading infection.

- The CDC recommends cleaning surfaces with soap and then applying disinfectant.
- RIDOH requires cleanings of government buildings **at least once daily**. In addition, commonly touched surfaces, such as shared workstations, elevator buttons, door handles and railings should be cleaned in accordance with CDC guidance for specific industries, found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>.
- A full list of EPA's approved disinfectants for use against SARS-CoV-2 can be found [here](#).
 - Governmental organizations can prepare a bleach solution by mixing 5 tablespoons (1/3 cup) bleach per gallon of water or 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water.
- **WARNING:** Never mix bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser.

Note that these are minimum cleaning requirements – increased cleaning standards may apply to specific industries dependent on the type of work performed. Sector specific guidance for non-critical retailers be found at <https://www.reopeningri.com/>; more sector-specific guidance will be available on this website over time.

Access screening procedures

RIDOH requires establishing, at minimum, COVID-19 symptom screening and COVID-19 risk procedures to screen anyone entering a government building. People whose responses to screening questions indicate they are sick, or who show visible signs of illness, must be denied entrance and instructed to isolate.

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- At a minimum, governmental organizations must screen employees and visitors for self-reported symptoms consistent with COVID-19 and other COVID-19 risk factors upon entering the building.
- Screenings can be conducted verbally, by app, by phone, or by another method of the employer's choosing including, if necessary, the posting of an informational poster.
- RIDOH has published sample screening questions for businesses. Sample screening questions can be found at:
 - https://health.ri.gov/forms/screening/COVID19_Employee_Screening_Tool.pdf
 - https://health.ri.gov/otherlanguages/spanish/forms/screening/COVID19_Employee_Screening_Tool.pdf
- Deny entry to people with COVID-19 symptoms if they can't be explained by allergies or another non-infectious cause, as listed by the CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>.
- In the event that an employee is identified, pursuant to screening or otherwise, as having acute respiratory illness symptoms or is positive for any other COVID-19 risk factors, or is currently directed to be in quarantine or isolation, the employer should send the employee home and take any additional necessary and appropriate action, in accordance with applicable laws and current RIDOH guidance and regulations.

Governmental organizations may also choose to supplement screening questions with temperature checks. CDC guidance on temperature checks can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/general-business-faq.html>.

Governmental organizations that experience a COVID-19 case must cooperate closely with RIDOH to help mitigate the public health impact of the event and guide the exposed individual to appropriate resources.

For more information on COVID-19 testing, please see RIDOH's website for how to get a COVID-19 test: <https://health.ri.gov/covid/testing/>. Governmental organizations must respect individual privacy and must not disclose the name of employees who test positive to other employees or the public.

Procedures to respond to cases of illness in the workplace

In the event an employee becomes ill during the workday, they should be sent home immediately. Once a sick employee and those with possible exposure have left the impacted area(s), the area(s) should be closed off for heightened cleaning and disinfection in accordance with CDC protocols and guidelines. This would include a deep cleaning of all touchpoints throughout the impacted area and wiping down all surfaces, including glass.

Having COVID-19 sick leave policies is strongly encouraged and will be critical for the successful implementation of this requirement.

If an employee tests positive, the employer should immediately contact RIDOH at 401-222-8022, or 211 after hours, so they can assist in contact tracing and provide further instruction.

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Face masks and other personal protective equipment

Under [Executive Order 20-30](#), all employees and visitors are required to wear face coverings.

- Employers must provide appropriate face coverings to their employees. Either a cloth mask or surgical face mask is acceptable. Respirators, such as N95 masks, should be reserved for designated healthcare workers.
- Employees that require more extensive facial coverings due to industry-specific safety regulations, laws, or guidelines should continue to comply with the PPE requirements outlined within their respective industry-specific laws, regulations, and guidelines (i.e. medical professionals, professionals who use respiratory equipment, and professionals who handle hazardous waste.)
- Masks are required unless an employee and/or visitor can easily, continuously, and measurably maintain at least six (6) feet of distance from other employees and/or visitors for the duration of his or her work and/or time in a building.
- Nothing in [Executive Order 20-30](#) shall require a governmental organization to refuse entry to a visitor not wearing a face covering.
- Such protective face coverings are not required for certain individuals, per CDC guidance, or for:
 - Anyone for whom use of such face covering would be damaging to his or her health; or
 - Anyone who is developmentally unable to use such face covering, including young children who may not be able to effectively wear a face mask; or
 - When a face covering would inhibit an activity of daily living (e.g. eating); or
 - When a face covering would itself negatively impact the safety of an individual or lead to an increased risk of harm to others (e.g. near open flames); or
 - Face coverings are not required in settings where people who can easily and continuously maintain at least 6 feet of distance from other people.
- Further guidance on the use of face coverings can be found here: <https://commerceri.com/masks/>.
- For further guidance on accommodations for those with disabilities, please contact the Governor's Commission on Disabilities using the contact us page at <http://www.gcd.ri.gov/>.

Access to cleaning materials and hand hygiene

Employers must provide employees with ready access to cleaning/disinfecting wipes and/or cleaning materials so that commonly used surfaces can be wiped down before each use by a different person.

- Disinfecting products approved by EPA are preferred.
- Any cleaning product is acceptable.

Employers must also ensure that employees, customers, and visitors have ready access to soap and water and/or hand sanitizer **at all times**.

- Employers must provide employees with time to wash hands often if sanitizer is not provided.

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- All employees should wash their hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds.
- Employees must always wash hands immediately after removing gloves and conducting cleaning procedures.
- If soap and water are unavailable and hands are not visibly dirty, a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol may be used.
- If hands are visibly dirty, always wash hands with soap and water.

Guidelines related to travel

The CDC recommends that people avoid all nonessential travel because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Governor Raimondo issued Executive Orders, which require a mandatory 14-day quarantine for all out-of-state travelers entering the state for a non-work purpose. The Executive Orders can be found here: <https://governor.ri.gov/newsroom/orders/>.

Communications planning

Governmental organizations should develop a communications plan to explain the aspects of the Phase I operations to staff, visitors, community members, and other target audiences (e.g. businesses) as appropriate. Furthermore, governmental organizations should:

- Determine appropriate materials and channels for communicating information. Examples include:
 - Developing and disseminating a one-pager on its Phase I operations.
 - Posting information and FAQs to its website.
 - Sharing information on social media.
 - Developing and sharing screening tools and signage for public buildings and businesses.
 - It also strongly recommended that businesses consider developing materials accessible to the deaf, hard-of-hearing, and the visually impaired.
- Translate information in the languages most prevalent in the business' community.
- Continue to emphasize the importance of employees staying home if they are sick.

Governmental organizations are required to post posters describing the businesses rules for wearing of cloth face coverings, social distancing of 6 feet apart between parties, and specifying, at the entrance of facilities, that sick individuals should stay home. Posters encouraging healthy handwashing habits, in addition to the above posters, are recommended in common areas and near handwashing facilities.

Informational posters for businesses can be downloaded at: <https://health.ri.gov/covid/for/business/>

IV. Human resources

Guidance to minimize spread of COVID-19 among employees

Governmental organizations must have a minimum of one representative appointed to work with RIDOH on testing employees, contact tracing, case investigation, isolation and quarantine, and any other follow-up related to outbreak containment.

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Additional precautions for vulnerable populations may be required. Governmental organizations are required to comply with the Pandemic Preparedness in the Workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act, which has been recently revised to address its application to COVID-19 and can be found here: <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/pandemic-preparedness-workplace-and-americans-disabilities-act>

Furthermore, governmental organizations are encouraged to maintain consistent work crews and mitigate the number of other employees that each employee is exposed to in the workplace to the furthest extent feasible. Suggested workforce management practices for organizations to minimize the spread of COVID-19 among employees include:

- Organizing work crews into “teams” or “pods” that do not interact to mitigate the risk of transmission.
- Staggering work schedules to allow for fewer employees in any given workspace at any one time.
- Closing communal spaces where possible (break rooms, conference rooms, etc.).

Training plans to meet the safety guidelines

Each organization is strongly encouraged to develop a training plan to ensure that employees are able to meet the safety guidelines in accordance with [OSHA requirements](#) and those requirements described throughout this guidance document. Governmental organizations may include their COVID-19-related training plans in their COVID-19 Control Plan.

Additional resources can be found at: <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/pandemic-preparedness-workplace-and-americans-disabilities-act>.

V. Supplies

Supplies needed for Phase I

Supplies required for all organizations during phase one include:

- Face masks (cloth or surgical face masks are acceptable).
- EPA-approved disinfectant solutions or other general cleaning supplies (spray bottles, bleach, surface cleaners, etc.).
- Materials for handwashing stations (soap and running water) and/or hand sanitizer bottles at workstations.

Suggested, not required, supplies include:

- Disinfectant wipe stations near communal objects.
- Thermal cameras or no-touch temperature measuring stations.
- Signage on capacity limits (external to building.)
- Individually distributed cleaning supplies for employees to encourage cleaning of personal workspaces (cleaning of desks, cubicles, workstations, check-out areas, cash registers, etc.) This is in addition to the required general cleaning supplies that must be made readily available to employees.
- Plastic, plexi-glass, or other physical barriers where appropriate and feasible.

RIDOH recommends glove use **only** in settings that already require glove use (e.g. healthcare settings, food preparation).

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VI. Other considerations and additional resources

Below is a list of additional resources for governmental organizations on COVID-19-related guidance and planning:

- Ensure your HVAC system is operating effectively and consider increasing the supply of outdoor air through your HVAC system.
 - Guidance on COVID-19 and HVAC systems is available from [ASHRAE](#).
- The Rhode Island Manufacturers Association (RIMA) has published a COVID-19 Response Pledge that can be found here: [Guidelines for Plant Safety for Manufacturers](#).
- The CDC publishes regular [guidance on cleaning and disinfecting community facilities](#).
- The EPA has published a list of [responses to frequent COVID-19-related questions](#).
- Regular updates on COVID-19 and safety precautions are published on RIDOH's website at <https://health.ri.gov/covid/>.
- More detail on the State of Rhode Island's reopening plan can be found at: <https://www.reopeningri.com/>.
- For further guidance on accommodating for those with disabilities, please visit the Governor's Commission on Disabilities' website at <http://www.gcd.ri.gov/>.
- Further detail on OSHA guidance and workplace safety rules and regulations can be found at: <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/>.