

Considerations for Museum Reopenings

The American Alliance of Museums recommends that museums build flexible plans for reopening that are regularly reviewed and refined based on the latest science. This guidance is based on the best available information as of publication and is not intended to supersede guidance from public health officials, medical experts, and federal/state/local governments. Museums are encouraged to seek legal and other expert advice on their specific circumstances. Below are some considerations for reopening:

Develop a phased timeline

A gradual approach allows your museum to prioritize health and safety while taking progressive steps to restore regular operations. It also provides flexibility for regular monitoring and revision of your plan. For an example of what a phased plan may look like, see the [sample museum reopening plans](#) in the [preparing to reopen](#) section of AAM's guide of [COVID-19 resources & information for the museum field](#).

Coordinate locally

- » **Coordinate with authorities.** Establish and continue communication with state and local authorities to determine current mitigation levels in your community and to coordinate your plans for reopening. Look for city, county, state, and federal officials to lift closure orders and the CDC and local public health departments to provide clearance.
- » **Coordinate with other museums.** Connect with other museums in your community for consistency and possibly for supply sharing. For a list of other AAM member institutions in your area, see [AAM's member museum directory](#).

Assess conditions

Even when legally permitted to reopen, museum leaders should determine when they feel they can do so safely, keeping in mind considerations such as:

- » **Downward trend in local COVID-19 cases:** [Federal guidelines](#) identify criteria for states to satisfy before they proceed to their phased reopening plans, such as reporting a declining trajectory of coronavirus cases for 14 days straight. [Data from the CDC](#) and from your [jurisdiction's department of health](#) may be useful in making decisions about when to reopen. The [COVID-19 Tracking Project](#) monitors the quality of state data and also helps track how many people have been tested.
- » **Sufficient staff resources.** Many museums have furloughed or laid off staff as a result of COVID-19 closures. Your museum may need time to recruit, hire, orient, and properly train or retrain staff at all levels in operating, safety, and enhanced cleaning procedures. You may also need to hire additional staff in key functions such as custodial services and security.
- » **Availability of equipment and supplies:** Before reopening, ensure that you have adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene behaviors for staff and visitors, to provide appropriate

personal protective equipment (PPE), and to properly clean/disinfect your facilities—and that essential supplies can be restocked as needed.

Prioritize health and safety

In developing your museum’s plan for reopening, follow guidance from the [CDC](#), the U.S. Department of Labor’s [Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#) (OSHA), as well as orders and recommendations from federal/state/local governments and your [state](#) and [local](#) health officials. In particular, the American Alliance of Museums recommends these two resources for their comprehensive health and safety information for employers:

- » [CDC’s Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)
- » [OSHA/HHS’s Guidance for Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#)

The best way to prevent illness is to protect against exposure to the virus. Your museum should promote [measures](#) for everyone (staff/volunteers and visitors) to avoid getting sick and, as an employer, you should take additional measures to help reduce transmission and protect employees. Those measures include:

- » **Assessing risk.** Consider who is most at risk in your museum—taking into account criteria such as [age and/or underlying conditions](#) as well as [specific job duties](#). OSHA provides [interim guidance](#) based on exposure risk levels, including specific interim guidance for [retail operations](#) and [environmental \(i.e., janitorial\) operations](#). These risk assessments should guide your plan.
- » **Promoting frequent hand washing** or, if soap and water are not readily available, use of hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Make sure employees can take regular breaks to wash their hands. Provide hand sanitizer (with at least 60 percent alcohol) for staff, especially those in higher-volume environments such as points of sale. If possible, offer hand sanitizer stations throughout the museum for visitors.
- » **Ensuring physical distancing.** Take measures to ensure physical distancing for staff and visitors. If some staff are able to work from home, consider extending telework policies. Also consider how staff schedules can be staggered, workplaces reconfigured, and visitor capacity and access restricted to decrease contact (see “Restrict contact, capacity, and access” below for additional recommendations).
- » **Providing protective equipment:** Your employees should have access to appropriate protective equipment, based on your risk assessment and workers’ specific job duties.
 - o Custodial staff and others who are cleaning or disinfecting are at increased risk of being exposed to the virus and to toxic effects of cleaning chemicals. They should have access to [appropriate PPE](#) for cleaning and disinfecting, such as **gloves and gowns**.
 - o **Barriers** like protective panels can help maintain distance between staff and visitors. Museums may be able to reuse exhibition materials such as Plexiglas vitrines to create barriers.

- **Cloth face covers** are particularly essential in times when physical distancing is not possible. Encourage or require the wearing of [face covers](#) by staff and visitors, except for children younger than 2 years old or those with a chronic disease that makes breathing difficult. For staff, keep in mind that transparent face covers are often helpful for individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing and rely on lipreading. See AAM's resource on face masks in the Hot Topics section of our [COVID-19 resource page](#).
- » **Covering coughs and sneezes.** Provide tissues for employees, along with touch-free trashcans for disposal. The [CDC encourages everyone](#) to keep masks on when coughing and/or sneezing and to continue to use your elbow to cover both. Maintaining a physical distance and covering your mouth and nose are the best ways to reduce the risk of infection.
- » **Ensuring that sick people stay home or leave the premises immediately.** This includes implementing flexible sick leave and supportive policies and practices (see “Review and update your workplace policies” below for additional recommendations), identifying an isolation room or area to separate anyone who exhibits COVID-like symptoms, and immediately sending home or seeking medical attention for anyone with symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, shortness of breath).

Establish clear cleaning/disinfecting and ventilation protocols

Update your museum's cleaning protocols based on [CDC's recommendations for cleaning and disinfecting facilities](#), [CDC's reopening guidance for cleaning and disinfecting public spaces and workplaces](#), and [industry-recommended practices for collections care](#). If you operate a food-service area, follow [FDA best practices](#).

- » **Increase the frequency** of cleaning of high-touch areas such as payment stations, touch screens, bathrooms, door and sink handles, water fountains, railings, keyboards, phones, and light switches. Conduct a full deep clean every evening.
- » **Train staff** to wipe down surfaces after every interaction and between timed-entry visitations.
- » **Allocate additional resources to cleaning.** These heightened cleaning protocols may add extra costs for cleaning supplies and for cleaning professionals.
- » **Ensure that ventilation systems are operating properly** and increase the circulation of outdoor air into the museum as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, and other methods. Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety risk to employees or visitors.

Restrict contact, capacity, and access

As part of your museum's phased approach, consider how you can limit person-to-person contact, monitor the number of visitors, and restrict or prohibit access to certain areas of the museum. Your plan may include:

- » **Online ticket sales only** if this is an option for your museum. Alternatively, limit cash and paper receipt transactions. “Touchless” payment options are recommended.

- » **Providing digital visitor guides and materials** instead of physical copies at the museum.
- » **Regulating interactives** (e.g., touchscreens) by providing disposable stylus pens, or if unavailable, signage or physical barriers to prohibit use. As your plan progresses, you may consider installing hand sanitizing stations near these spaces for safer usage.
- » **Capacity restrictions for visitors** including timed tickets for entry and monitoring traffic flow (e.g., only allowing a certain number of visitors in a space at a given time).
- » **No or limited access** to theaters, cafés, high-traffic areas, and particularly tight spaces in the museum. If you have multiple entrances, consider limiting access to only one or two.
- » **Cancelling or restricting group visits, guided tours, public programs, and special or private events** until safe to offer them, and then limiting the number of participants.
- » **Using signage or barriers** to enforce physical distancing guidelines, including at ticketing and information desks, in shops/cafés, and for security guards.
- » **Establish one-way flow** through the museum and within galleries, to facilitate distancing.
- » **For outdoor spaces**, closing restroom facilities and picnic areas, marking trails to encourage one-way travel, and closing off parking on streets next to your facility.

Update your workplace policies and support your staff

Policies for employee leave, telework, and compensation should be reviewed and updated to protect your staff, provide flexibility, and ensure that sick employees are able to stay home. Also consider the emotional toll on your staff and take steps to promote wellness.

- » **Actively monitor evolving guidelines** from the [CDC](#), [OSHA](#), the [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) (EEOC) and others as they pertain to pandemic situations. Engage your museum's legal team or legal counsel in the review of your policies.
- » **Review the latest federal legislation** to ensure your museum is in compliance with new provisions to support and protect employees. AAM has provided summaries of the legislation highlighting information relevant to museums and museum professionals on our [COVID-19 financial relief & resources page](#). Prominently display the required Department of Labor [poster](#) outlining employee rights mandated by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act.
- » **Help employees stay healthy** with these tips about recommended [business policies and procedures](#) from the CDC.
- » **Support staff mental health and wellbeing.** The COVID-19 pandemic will affect the mental health and wellbeing of employees well beyond the immediacy of the initial crisis. The National Safety Council regularly updates a [resource page](#) with information about the employer role in mental health, working with benefit providers, stress reduction, substance misuse, and more.
- » **Keep equity in mind** when crafting policies and [financial considerations](#). AAM's [COVID-19 diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion \(DEAI\) resource list](#) provides information to support individuals, teams, and institutions in centering DEAI in times of crisis.

- » If implementing **health checks**, conduct them safely and respectfully, and in accordance with any applicable privacy laws and regulations. Confidentiality should be respected. Employers may use examples of screening methods in [CDC's General Business FAQs](#) as a guide.
- » **Designate a specific staff person or team** to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. Identify the person or team to staff and let staff know how to contact them.
- » **Create a communications system** for staff for self-reporting of symptoms and notification of exposures and closures.

Provide training for staff

Museums should provide guidance or training for staff to protect staff and promote safe interactions with visitors. The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) offers [educational resources and tools](#) intended for workers who are at greatest risk of exposure during the COVID-19 pandemic, including a [training](#) on protecting oneself from COVID-19 in the workplace.

Give staff clear guidelines for how to respond if visitors are not following health and safety protocols, such as alerting museum security or a high-level supervisor.

Communicate clearly and frequently

Communicate proactively with both staff and the public about your plans and the protocols in place for their health and safety. [Research](#) from Edelman found that people consider employer communications the most credible source of information about COVID-19, and we know that museums are among the most trusted institutions in their communities (see “Museums are Trusted” section of AAM’s [museum facts and data](#)). Our institutions can play an important role in assuring staff and educating the public about the science and facts of COVID-19.

- » **Provide education and training materials** for employees and the public, such as the CDC’s [fact sheets and posters](#). You may also consider adding a list of community resources and tip sheets on your website, on signage in the museum, and even in your programming.
- » **Display visible signage** and other indicators, such as floor decals and tape lines, to explain and enforce your policies on physical distancing, hand washing, and other requirements and recommendations.
- » **Share with the public** your cleaning protocols and steps you are taking to ensure their safety—both on your website and throughout the museum (e.g. main entrance, gallery entrances, bathrooms).

Connect with the broader museum community

- » **Join the robust conversation** on [Museum Junction](#) to learn alongside your peers.
- » **Access additional guidance** on AAM’s [COVID-19 resource page](#) on [preparing to reopen](#).
- » **Participate in #AAMvirtual**, AAM’s [virtual convening](#) on May 18 and June 1-4, where the museum community will address how we can overcome the current threat and rebuild a more sustainable, inclusive, and powerful museum field for the future.

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Support Free COVID-19 Resources for the Museum Field

The current crisis is taking a distressing financial toll on cultural organizations, and AAM is no different. In these challenging times, we ask that if you can, consider supporting our [advocacy work](#) and making extensive [COVID-19 resources](#) freely available for our field, by [making a donation](#) or [becoming a member](#) of AAM. Thank you for your much-needed support.