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# Introduction to Safely Reopening Municipal Facilities

The closures to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) have been devastating to local economies of all sizes, with a projected [loss of \\$360 Billion](#) in city revenues over the next three years. Vulnerable communities – Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and people with low-incomes – are seeing the harshest fallout in financial instability, sickness and deaths.

Municipalities are faced with the challenge of deciding when and how to reopen their economies. **Balancing public health, economic and workforce priorities is vital but complicated. Wait too long and risk even more harm to the economy. Move too soon and get an uptick in cases and deaths causing further damage to the local economy, as well as residents' mental and physical wellbeing.**

This toolkit was developed to provide resources to support local leaders on reopening their economy. NLC is rolling out a series of resources over the next few weeks, starting with:

- Guidelines for Preparing for Reopening
- Care Providers Make Return to Work Possible
- Public Works, Parks and Recreation
- Public Transit

Future topics include:

- Non-Essential Businesses and Restarting the Economy
- Code Enforcement
- Public Safety
- Communications

Let NLC know what is helpful and what other topics you want guidance or support on, as we continue to provide resources for you, your community and your residents.

## Important Consideration on Reopening Your City, Town or Village

To reopen cities, towns, and villages with measured confidence in the absence of a safe and effective vaccine that is widely administered, the path forward must have the following checkpoints in concurring order:

1. Fourteen (14) consecutive days of reductions in positive cases and hospitalizations;
2. Widespread testing to diagnose COVID-19 and track status of spread across populations;
3. Robust contact tracing to identify, trace and safely isolate people who are infected;
4. Sufficient health care capacity in personnel, facilities and equipment to treat those sick with COVID-19; and
5. Sufficient PPEs for all essential workers required for city operations, and for all workers going back to work.

The decision to reopen needs to be informed by data and be appropriate for local culture and context. As cities open in stages, the checkpoints above are vital to balancing continued mitigation and moving to containment. In light of many unknowns regarding the spread of the novel virus and its impact on people of all ages, a more conservative approach is prudent. Cities without sufficient capacity to test all residents will want to prioritize testing, tracing, access to healthcare and outreach to those who are most at risk: essential workers of all skill- and income-levels, people in nursing homes, people in prison, BIPOC, people in low-income communities and the elderly writ large.

The novel coronavirus continues to spread at varying rates around the country.

- The spread seems to have peaked in hot spots in certain parts of the country (large cities in New York, California, Illinois) in mid-April, however the decline is very slow. Furthermore, COVID-19 spread has yet to peak across the U.S. as a whole and many less densely populated rural regions and states are seeing a rise in infections.
- Precipitous opening in timing or scope could result in repeated rise in COVID-19 spread, forcing wave after wave of future shutdowns -- even more devastating than one prolonged shutdown in undermining consumer and market confidence.
- A staged lifting of [stay-at-home](#) restrictions and continued safe distancing are vital during this transition.

Authoritative, science-based [recommendations](#) for reopening include a combination of wide-scale testing and aggressive contact tracing. The [White House Reopening Guidelines](#) provide high level data-based criteria on testing and tracing capacity and the responsibility of businesses and individuals.

The main point of reopening is to get people back to work. To do so while managing risk requires selective relaxations of stay-at-home orders and reopening while keeping a sharp eye on what's happening to people as reopening unfolds. Testing combined with contact tracing is vital to spot areas of outbreaks and contain them by moving to safely isolate individuals who are infected and to quarantine those who were in contact with them. Only then will consumers have the confidence to emerge from their homes, go back to work and patronize the services and establishments they need and enjoy.

Municipal officials' leadership and communications are vital to residents and businesses in their community: to continue to practice physical distancing or lower occupancy limits in commercial establishments; to implement temperature checks, staggered shifts and physical barriers at worksites; to do deep cleaning and new sanitation of worksites; to require the use of personal protective gear (e.g., face masks, gloves) in public. Even in states where governors ordered reopening, local jurisdictions often have the latitude to take more conservative approaches.

City leaders can continue to prohibit gatherings of more than 10 people and activities that have proven to spread COVID-19, e.g., large in-person barbecue parties, funerals and weddings. Additionally, city officials can manage expectations and must be prepared to ratchet up physical distancing and stay-at-home orders should infection rates rise. Where necessary, city officials may need to educate and overcommunicate the need to safely distance to community members, and ensure equitable enforcement as a last resort, so as to not disproportionately target certain neighborhoods and people of color.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) just released [guidance for Opening America Up Again](#). Appendix F provides specific guidance for Child Care Programs, Schools and Day Camps, Employers with Workers at High Risk, Restaurants and Bars, and Mass Transit Administrators. Detailed guidance for food establishments are also provided in the FDA's [Best Practices for Reopening Retail Food Establishment](#) and the [National Restaurant Associations guidelines](#) for its industry members. Various municipalities, e.g., the California cities and county health departments, have developed [social distancing protocols](#) for businesses. Below is a list of collected guidance from state and federal sources:

#### **Federal Guidance**

[Reopening Operations Guidelines from FEMA](#)

[CDC Reopening guidance](#)

[Workplace preparation guidance from OSHA](#)

[Pandemic preparation guidance for workplaces from EPA](#)

#### **State Government and State Municipal League Guidance**

[IL Governor's plan to reopen state](#)

[KY Governor's plan to reopen state](#)

[KY "Healthy at Work" plan to reopen economy](#)

[MN Employment and Economic Development Safely Returning to Work](#)

[Record retention guidelines](#) (Association of Washington Cities)

[Non-healthcare workplace PPE guidance](#) (Association of Washington Cities)

[Advice for cleaning up coronavirus for local governments](#) (Florida League of Cities)

[PPE Guidance](#) (Florida League of Cities)

[Return to work check list](#) (Georgia Municipal Association)

[Template for infectious disease business continuity preparation](#) (League of Minnesota Cities)

[Tips for Maintaining Civility and Providing Leadership](#) (League of Minnesota Cities)  
[Return to Work Guidance](#) (League of Minnesota Cities)  
[Development of Reopening Advisory Board](#) (Massachusetts Municipal Association)  
[City of Grand Haven Return to work plan](#) (Michigan Municipal League)  
[MML Return to Work Survey](#) (Michigan Municipal League)  
[Phase 1 Reopening Exec Order from NC Governor](#) (North Carolina League of Municipalities)  
[Return to Work Exec Order from TN Governor](#) (Tennessee Municipal League)  
[SD Back to Normal Plan](#) (South Dakota Municipal League)  
[Governor's Report to Reopen TX](#) (Texas Municipal Leagues)  
[Draft reopening plan](#) (Vermont League of Cities and Towns)

## Communication is Key

There are signs of progress and reductions in transmission and death rates in hot spots of the U.S. but progress will be a long and difficult process until a vaccine is developed and safely administered. Cities must find a “new normal,” where residents can get back to work, to do things they enjoy in a different way than pre-COVID days – this means sacrificing certain amenities to do things more safely than before, in order to minimize viral transmissions.

Local leaders can instill a sense of community and shared responsibility, and prevent complacency. As cities, towns and villages reopen their economy in a landscape of uncertainty, local officials bring credibility and relationships that can strengthen public confidence and support a range of actions to increase safety:

- Be transparent about the spread of infections and illnesses – stay on top of the evolving spread and potential need to take action to ratchet up safe distancing.
- Work with contiguous cities/counties to coordinate actions and communications whenever possible. Consistency in guidance helps reinforce guidelines and keep people safe while emerging from their homes.
- Work with local health department, state and regional partners for sufficient [testing and contact tracing](#). Notify city residents about the availability of testing and loosening guidelines for who can get tests if additional testing capacity is now available.
  - o Ensure the data software and management of tracing is built with an equity lens.
  - o Build community confidence in contract tracing, and ensure honesty, accountability, and transparency about the process.
- Prioritize vulnerable communities – people who lack access to testing and good care, and who live or work in places with high risk of infections. These areas of greatest need include essential workers, nursing homes, and neighborhoods with a high concentration of people of color.

- Communicate and reinforce guidelines for safe distancing, personal protective gear, sanitation of facilities and frequent handwashing as businesses reopen and people emerge from stay-at-home. Underscore that each individual, business and organization has a role to play.
  - o Emphasize that it takes a range of interventions to keep people safe while economic activity returns. No one intervention is 100% protective, but layering multiple methods protects each person better – and the community as a whole.
  - o Businesses can reconfigure their facilities, implement sanitation standards and introduce procedures for workers upon return (e.g., deep cleaning, temperature checks, wearing face masks, barriers between workstations, staggered shifts).
  - o Individuals can go back to work, patronize services and retail establishments and enjoy parks while practicing safe distancing, washing their hands and sanitizing surfaces frequently, and wearing face masks (and if required, disposable gloves) where they will interact with others in close settings.
  - o Very importantly – manage expectations! Maintain persistence of above practices as cities open up and prepare the community for the potential need to ratchet up stay-at-home orders if COVID-19 symptoms and hospitalizations surge.