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Nonessential Businesses

Restarting local economies will be the defining challenge of this decade. Communities across the country are experiencing lost livelihoods, the shuttering of local businesses, and tremendous uncertainty around what comes next. The pressure to reopen businesses and “return to normal” will be intense but opening too soon or without appropriate safety measures will increase the risk of COVID-19 spread.

Mayors and city officials will play a crucial role in evaluating the risks associated with reopening “nonessential” businesses¹, in creating and ensuring compliance with clear health guidelines for businesses to follow, and in communicating with business owners and the public in a way that manifests trust and encourages wide-scale adoption of physical distancing practices.

- A. Create a task force for reopening nonessential businesses.** Reopening businesses will have significant implications for community members, public health, public safety, regional commerce, and local economic development. Stakeholders from each of these sectors should be brought into the process to share their input.
- B. Assess the risk of reopening nonessential businesses.** Reopening businesses, under any circumstance, will increase the risk of COVID-19 spread. There is no single standard that cities can reliably use to determine whether reopening businesses is safe. Multiple sources recommend some combination of the following:
 - a. A decline in new cases for 14 days.
 - b. Adequate hospital capacity to care for all new patients and to provide PPE to healthcare workers.
 - c. Sufficient capacity for rapid diagnostic testing.
 - d. The presence of robust contact tracing.
- C. Identify which nonessential businesses are burdened the most.** It is important to know as much as you can about which nonessential businesses are impacted the most. Are there certain industries impacted? Are there certain

¹ “Nonessential businesses” is a term being used by states to distinguish between businesses that are allowed to remain open because they are critical to societal functioning and those that have been asked to temporarily close (Source: John Hopkins Center for Health Security)

communities or neighborhoods where nonessential businesses are burdened the most? Does the nonessential business workforce disproportionately impact people of color? Requesting disaggregated data is critical for making data-informed decisions in how resources and strategies are targeted to those who need it the most.

D. Codify health and safety protocols for nonessential businesses. Some health and safety guidelines apply across sectors while others are industry-specific. See below for samples of each type.

a. Cross-cutting

- i. CDC: [Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#)
- ii. OSHA: [Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#)

b. Industry-specific

- i. National Restaurant Association: [Reopening Guidance](#)
- ii. OSHA: [COVID-19 Guidance for Retail Workers](#)

E. Stagger reopening. Most experts recommend a phased reopening of businesses by sector dependent on the health risks posed by each. See below for sample risk assessments.

- a. Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security: [Risk Assessment – “Nonessential” Businesses \(p.12\)](#)
- b. McKinsey & Company: [Risk Assessment \(Exhibit 7\)](#)

F. Communication. A consistent communication strategy – including press coverage, mobile alerts, FAQ pages, social media posts, infographics, and on-street signage – should be implemented throughout the reopening process. Ensure that materials are accessible in a variety of languages, including American Sign Language. Residents and business owners should also be provided with an easily accessible method of providing feedback and concerns to the task force.

G. Monitoring and certification. Businesses that reopen are unlikely to be patronized to the extent they were before the pandemic until residents are assured of their safety. Some cities, states, and counties are providing certification to businesses that implement recommended health and safety protocols. These certifications, like the safety inspection notices posted in elevators or in restaurant windows, signal to customers that the business is following CDC guidelines.

- a. [Chicago Business Self-Certification](#)
- b. [Connecticut Business Reopening Self-Certification](#)
- c. [Sonoma County Business Mitigation Practices and Self-Certification](#)

Resources

- Centers for Disease Control, April 2020. "[Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes](#)"
- OSHA, 2020. "[Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#)"
- John Hopkins Center for Health Security, April 2020. "[Public Health Principles for a Phased Reopening During COVID-19: Guidance for Governors](#)"
- McKinsey & Company, April 2020. "[Winning the \(local\) COVID-19 war](#)"
- Boston Consulting Group, April 2020. "[Beyond the Curve: How to Restart in the Wake of COVID-19](#)"