13 Strategies for Employee Social Distancing:
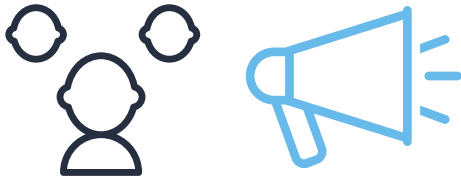
Create Your Rebuilding Plan

Employee social distancing will allow you to rebuild your business. But you will probably need to make major changes in how you get work done.

Employers are inventing, testing, and tweaking solutions. And they're working! Let's look at what innovative organizations are doing right now.

Employee Social Distancing Success Stories

"Everyone is putting employees first, customers right behind and financial gain third. That's on the back burner right now. It's about doing the right thing for the employees and for the community. I've heard that across the board, from Fortune 50 companies on down."
- CEO Brad Heath, VirTex

VirTex Enterprises LP manufactures electronics components. The company has over 800 employees at eight facilities. To date, not one of its 800 employees has contracted COVID-19.

The company is staggering shifts, lunches and breaks. They encourage regular hand washing. The cleaning crew disinfects every surface a minimum of twice per day. They check temperatures as people enter the facility.

Companies around the world are using ingenuity to keep employees healthy while rebuilding their businesses.

We've gathered a list of strategies for you to consider. They won't all apply to every business. Hopefully you can find a combination that will allow you to retool, retrench and rebuild.

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5 Goals of Management for Employee Social Distancing

Businesses must consider the following:

1. Employee, customer, and vendor health and safety
2. Employee morale
3. Productivity
4. Business reputation
5. OSHA, ADA, and EEOC compliance
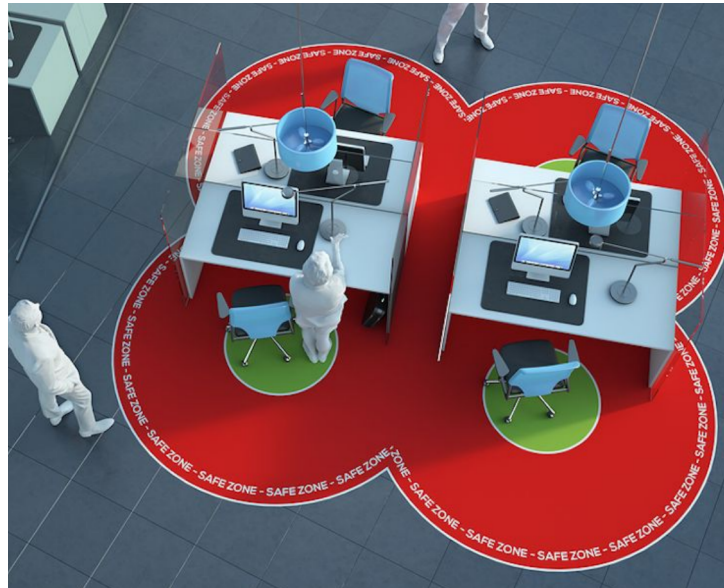
13 Employee Social Distancing Strategies

A comprehensive solution may include the following:

- Redesigned shift scheduling
- Flexible job roles
- Physical workspace adjustments
- Remote meetings with co-workers and customers
- New cleaning and sanitation protocols

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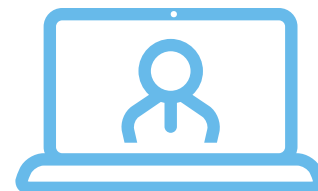
01 Schedule rules

First we'll discuss employee scheduling strategies. Then we'll explore general operational techniques.

With scheduling software, you can set rules that enforce employee social distancing.

Schedule rules give you the power to manage the dynamics of time and space.

- Time: How many employees are in the office at the same time and for what duration?

- Space: Where are the employees working and are they physically separated?

Set rules in your employee scheduling software based on the following:

1. Occupancy limits for floors, shared workspaces, production lines
2. Necessary interval between shifts for sanitizing workstations
3. Sufficient time after hours for deep cleaning and sanitizing (or rotational for around-the-clock operations)
4. Separate teams by shift or location to prevent illness from spreading from one team to another
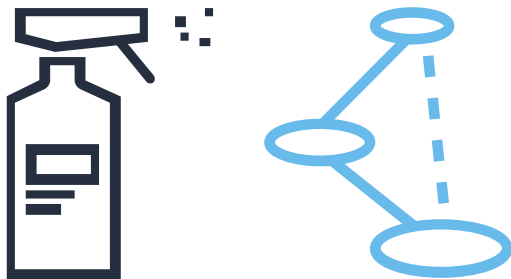
With rules in place, the system will guide you as you create schedules. Customization permits a high degree of complexity.

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02 Staggered schedules

Many U.S. school districts and businesses are planning to stagger schedules when they reopen. This can lower the risk of disease transmission considerably. The fewer people onsite at a time, the better. This brings us to our next strategy; additional shifts.

03 Add shifts

If you've been a 9-5 workplace, offer more options. If some of your business operations can be done any time throughout the day and night, add swing, graveyard or weekend shifts. Many of your employees are struggling with childcare. They might appreciate the option of working outside traditional business hours. A compressed workweek can limit the number of employees onsite at the same time. Four 10-hour shifts squeeze a 40-hour workweek into four days. A 9/80 schedule is also common; 80 hours in a two-week period spread over nine days instead of ten.

"We split the workday into two shifts, with a sanitizing/cleaning session in between, to dramatically reduce the number of casual social contact events."
- CEO Tom Markusic Firefly Aerospace, Inc.

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04 Alternate meals and breaks

Alternate or stagger meals and other breaks. This will limit the number of people in the break room. You could also require employees to eat at their desks if your break room is small.

05 Reduce meeting size or go virtual
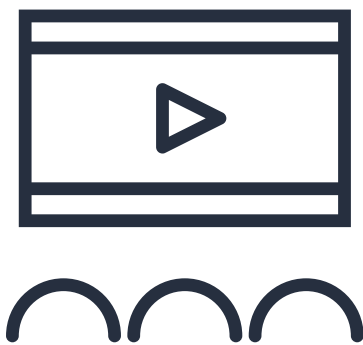
Instead of cramming everyone into the largest conference room, replace large meetings with smaller groups. Make sure the chairs are spaced appropriately. Even if your workforce is back onsite, you don't need to stop videoconferencing (after all, we're now experts at un-muting). Virtual meetings prevent physical contact–use them even if you're meeting with a co-worker down the hall. If your employees meet with customers face-to-face, switch to video.

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06 Control access to workspaces

Use touchless proximity card or iris scan biometric time clocks (PIN pad or fingerprint scan clocks need to be disinfected between each employee). Place one at each work area entrance. Only allow access to the necessary employees. This will also limit visitors, vendors or clients from wandering through the facility.

Mobile phone-based timekeeping can help managers keep track of employees as they clock in and out. In the app, managers can draw areas on a map to designate approved working locations. As employees use the online clock, the manager can see at a glance if they are outside their assigned area. This can be invaluable for work-from-home employee management as well as for large multi-building campuses. It also supports social distancing by removing the need for these employees to congregate at a shared time clock during shift changes.

07 Cross-train

Cross-training is a great social distancing tool. If each employee can perform multiple tasks, you won't need as many at the worksite. Cross-train your current staff. Rewrite job descriptions for future hires. New hires will understand that they will learn more than one job role. It may help you in your hiring efforts. Coordinate expanded job descriptions with your career development program. Build cross-training into your onboarding. This may have the indirect benefit of improved retention. Employees favor companies that allow them to expand their skills. It will also prevent shift coverage gaps. When an employee can't work a shift, managers have more qualified workers to cover.

"Digital marketing agency Levelwing is co-mingling departments so an entire account team can be taken out without impacting their output."
- Media Post

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08 Separate onsite and offsite tasks

Make an audit of the tasks required for each department, team or business function. Identify which tasks can be performed offsite. Have at-home employees perform those tasks. If you are alternating in-office and at-home working (see step #9), separate tasks accordingly. You may need to adapt dependent processes to the new schedule. Combine this exercise with cross-training. Increased flexibility is an added bonus.

09 Alternate onsite and at-home working
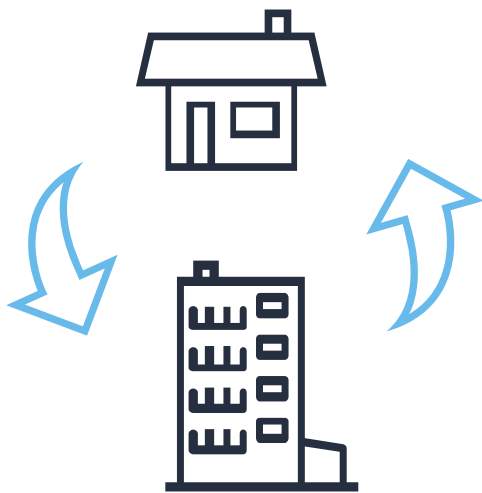
Once you have identified onsite and offsite tasks, you can split them accordingly. Many employees enjoy alternating office/home days. It lets them connect with their teams while supporting work/life balance.

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10 Minimize ridesharing

In construction and field service, it's common for two or more employees to drive together. While many companies may not be able to afford a separate vehicle for each employee, there are ways to make ridesharing safer. Require employees to wear masks while traveling together. Stock each business vehicle with hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes. Ensure adequate ventilation. Create vehicle sanitizing protocols. Companies with a fleet of vehicles can assign each team (or employee) one vehicle for their exclusive use. If an employee becomes infected, it will minimize the possibility of others contracting the virus from contaminated vehicle surfaces. Evaluate how many employees need to be at each jobsite. Maximize the use of video collaboration between onsite and offsite employees.

11 Health protection prompts and alerts

Many HR software and hardware systems have prompts and alerts. They are invaluable when it comes to keeping employees safe. Interactive "intelligent" physical time clocks can be programmed to prompt employees to report symptoms. HRMS have similar features. For example, SwipeClock WorkforceHUB has company messages and manager check-ins.

Here are some alerts that can help keep your workforce healthy:

- Hand washing
- Keep your distance
- Sanitize workstation
- Respiratory etiquette
- Break room occupancy limits
- Put a mask on for face-to-face meetings
- Symptom check
- Notification of exposure to infected co-worker

This "wellness program" may be your most important one to date.

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12 Wearable technology

IoT companies are retooling for the times with wearable social distancing devices. For example, GPS-enabled wristbands that beep when you get too close to a co-worker. These devices can also help in the unfortunate event you need to do contact tracing.

13 Redesign physical spaces

Workplace design influences behavior. Assemble an office redesign committee. Consult the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidelines. As you plan, use an app that shows different arrangements for desks, chairs, conference room, movable walls and shared spaces. This will save you a lot of furniture moving in the planning stages.
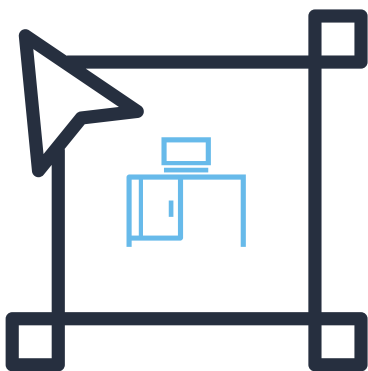
Mark traffic lanes. Invest in touchless devices wherever possible. Put up signs with occupancy limits and health reminders. If your break room is too small to allow for social distancing, consider areas you could repurpose. A Kentucky meat processing facility added room by putting up large tents outside for workers to spread out during breaks.

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Social distancing isn't going away anytime soon

Employee management has to adapt. Social distancing isn't going away. COVID-19 is still circulating through communities. There isn't overwhelming evidence that contracting the virus once provides immunity for subsequent exposure. Even if the pandemic abates somewhat during the summer, it may return in the fall even stronger.

Employers will need to enforce social distancing for many months, if not years. It doesn't matter what your state government is doing. It doesn't matter if the salon next door is cutting hair and manicuring nails. Until there is a vaccine developed–and everyone has access to it–we need to stay six feet apart. It's likely a vaccine will take at least 18 months if not longer.

Follow a plan for bringing employees back to work

Sending employees home was abrupt. IT teams scrambled to set up the infrastructure. Newly remote workers had little notice or preparation. Some are just starting to be productive. HR teams are grappling with time-sucking coronavirus-related sick leave obligations. Business owners are struggling to secure Paycheck Protection loans as websites crash and applications are lost.

Clearly, the pandemic's effect on businesses hasn't abated. However, bringing employees back to work doesn't need to be as chaotic as sending them home without warning.

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Make sure your plan is legal

Return-to-work plans have serious legal implications. Even well-meaning strategies like protecting older, higher-risk employees can amount to age discrimination.

"If government regulators impose physical restrictions on the number of employees a physical workplace may accommodate or specific conditions (e.g., mandatory spacing of offices, removal of carrel farms), employers may have to stagger their workforce's return (whether it is a return from a furlough or a return from teleworking). As with any other employment decision, selecting who may and who may not return, and the sequencing of that return, may implicate anti-discrimination laws. Those laws, which require employers to have a legitimate non-discriminatory basis for impactful employment decisions, require sensitivity to choices based on age and health. Similarly, employees on protected leave (such as FMLA and FFCRA) may have reinstatement rights that must be considered in conjunction with a return to work."

- National Law Review

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SwipeClock TimeSimplicity

TimeSimplicity employee scheduling software can handle complex scheduling for social distancing. Whether you are scheduling 50 employees or 500, TimeSimplicity is the solution for employee health and safety. Let's look at some key features.

Shift Alignment

The employee can be assigned a skill level and only be assigned shifts where they meet the skill requirement. As you cross-train to increase competencies, adjust the skill level as necessary.

Customizable Summary Calculation

Flexible summary reporting with formula calculations for: shift counts, total hours, expected dollars based on hours, counts of shifts, hours per employee or employee groups and more.

Scheduling Groups

Define and schedule groups based on location, team, skills, back-to-the-office phase, availability, location, positions, departments or other attributes.

Automated Workflows

Saves time by preventing managers having to do the same basic tasks over and over.

Drag-and-Drop Scheduling

Makes it easy and simple for managers to use without the need for much additional training.

Employee Search

Schedulers can search for an employee by first or last name.

Self-Scheduling and Open Shifts

Create open shifts with signup for any eligible employee. Simplifies sick leave, quarantine leave and FMLA management.

Move/Reassign Shifts

Schedulers have the option to remove shifts from terminated employees if they are not needed, move them to the open shift row for others to pick up, or copy the shifts to the open shift row.

Schedule Planning

Create custom individual or group schedules for date, time or occupancy limits. Repeat or customize for future schedules with draft planning versions.

Draft Schedule Creation

Create future schedules in plan mode and keep hidden until ready to publish.

TimeSimplicity®

For more information, schedule a TimeSimplicity demo today.

TALK TO AN EXPERT

sales@swipeclock.com | 888-223-3450

Or, click here to schedule a demo now

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