

# Five Important Considerations for Safer Back-to-Work Screening

Safeguards required by Executive Order 2020-114 involve screening employees and visitors prior to entering a workplace. For facilities with relatively low entrance/exit counts, screening requirements may be no more than a minor inconvenience. However, facilities like manufacturers with a labor model based on shiftwork have different needs, necessitating efficient screening of groups of employees before they begin work.

Some of the required safeguards include daily health questionnaires, temperature screening, dedicated entry points, security measures to prevent bypassing screening stations, and social distancing while queuing. Many facilities are not currently equipped to allow for these activities. In response, several facilities have erected open-air tents or created outdoor queuing lines.

Public officials caution COVID-19 will continue to be a threat until a vaccine is available; presumably then, screening protocols will still be necessary when the warm summer temperatures give way to the cold winds of another Michigan winter. Facilities need to prepare now for a sheltered screening area. The future of design may evolve, with screening areas becoming a basic component to building entry designs; similar to how airport security design evolved after 9/11. Until then, facilities need to adapt by utilizing renovation of existing space, creating additions, or erecting temporary enclosures. Many may elect to pursue temporary enclosures as these can likely be placed into service much quicker and more economically than a permanent solution.

Creating an enclosed space for health screening creates certain quandaries that require thoughtful solutions. Five things to consider:



**Temperature.** Required temperature screenings are typically conducted in one of two ways: employee self-reporting or onsite, touchless temperature assessment. Most temperature screenings will occur as part of the facility entry screening procedure. Touchless thermometers have a narrow ambient temperature operational range; they also require the tested person be acclimated to room temperatures. An outdoor, unconditioned environment will not be conducive to outdoor temperature screenings this winter, or even this summer as temperatures rise.

**Airflow and Filtration.** Space conditioning requires special consideration. With airborne pathogens, conditioning and movement of air in enclosed spaces can be a liability if improperly addressed. However, if handled correctly, ventilation can increase protection against the spread of infection. The American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) advises that a combination of dilution and

filtration is very successful in removing pathogens from enclosed spaces. Using high volumes of outdoor air utilizing laminar flow diffusers effectively dilutes contaminants in the air while filters with a minimum efficiency reporting value (MERV) rating of 13 should be used to filter contaminants. These strategies have been successfully employed in hospitals and laboratories for years. UV light sterilization, bipolar ionization, and maintaining humidity levels between 40%-60% are additional strategies but typically come with higher costs. Consider equipment selections carefully, there are a multitude of system types available and not all systems are well suited to the demands imposed by high outside air volumes or the pressure-drop created from the use of MERV 13 filters.

**Cleanability.** Hard, non-porous materials compatible with the intended cleaning products are required. Materials such as carpet, fabric, and even improperly finished gypsum board are difficult to sanitize. Layouts

with crevasses or tight, inside corners are difficult to clean. Touchpoints like doors, electronic screens, and writing utensils are special points of consideration.

**Privacy.** Health privacy laws, such as Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), need to be honored, records need to be secured and interactions between health screeners and employees are to be guarded. Use social distancing to your advantage, providing a little space between those being screened and those waiting in line helps maintain privacy.

**Testing Procedure.** Will an outside health assessment company be contracted to provide the screenings, or will internal employees be reassigned to fill this role? It may be beneficial to outsource this task to an outside organization that is responsible for PPE, record-keeping, and liabilities associated with providing health screenings. Companies specializing in this type of activity may also have access to technologies and procedures that help expedite screening such as touchless or paperless screening questionnaires.

As the wheels of industry begin turning again and the rush to reopen subsides, we look ahead for strategies to safely maintain our workplaces and avoid additional pandemic-related shutdowns. Presumably, the need for screening protocols is going to remain with us for at least another season. Giving thought to the issue now allows for development of effective and efficient solutions for your facility before our warm, sunny summer turns to another cold, windy winter.