

As employers continue to make preparations and pursue building upgrades that allow company employees to return to offices, the focus is on indoor air quality. And it's not just the HVAC industry that thinks so. Late last year, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) released a one-page guidance on how to [ensure good ventilation](#) in the workplace. The safety alert was in response to concerns about protecting against the spread of COVID-19 in office, building and workplace settings.

OSHA's [recommendations](#) include basic workplace courtesies such as encouraging employees to stay home when sick and enforcing the proper PPE. In addition, OSHA honed in on the role HVAC systems play in creating healthy indoor environments. Find out what their guidance suggests for office air ventilation, filtration and air quality.

HVAC System

When it comes to the building's actual HVAC system, OSHA recommends making sure all systems are fully functional. Considering the amount of time spent away from the office, HVAC systems may require maintenance or updates before returning.

OSHA also recommends that business owners, facility owners and employers work with HVAC professionals. It's easy to assume you can understand and complete the basic system checks required, but it's always better to leave it to the experts. Especially considering the nuances of building HVAC multi-systems and the critical need to optimize indoor air quality. To guarantee the best ventilation, filtration and healthiest airflow possible, it's smarter to [defer to contractors](#).

Office Ventilation

Good ventilation is an incredibly important indoor air quality necessity. Homes, buildings and offices alike [require fresh air](#). Ventilation, or the exchange of old stale air and new fresh air is simply the method that provides it. One of OSHA's ventilation recommendations is to increase the HVAC system and indoor space's outdoor air intake. AKA to increase the amount of fresh air entering the office space.

OSHA suggested opening windows when possible to increase ventilation. However, we know that open windows aren't even always possible for homes, let alone the workplace. The preferable way to ensure better office air ventilation? [Whole-building mechanical ventilation](#). A whole-building system is actively working to increase the amount of fresh air entering the space, continuously. This is also the kind of workplace investment that will make employees feel safer returning to work. Plus, mechanical ventilation has indoor air quality benefits that will far outlast the current workplace factors.

OSHA also focused on bettering spot ventilation. These are the localized mechanical ventilators such as exhaust fans in restrooms. It's crucial that these systems are also fully functional and operating at max capacity to reduce risk of spreading germs in smaller spaces. OSHA also recommends that these localized ventilation systems remain on. Their likely reasoning? A mechanical ventilation system can only work as well as you allow it to. Mechanical ventilation systems should be on at all times to provide continuous fresh air and improved ventilation.

Office Filtration

For filtration, OSHA had only one specific recommendation new to COVID guidelines, but it's precise. OSHA recommends upgrading [office air filters](#) to level MERV-13 or higher. At IAQ.works, we are big fans of [MERV-13 air filters](#). A MERV-13 filter is often the best air filter choice because it effectively captures and removes smaller particles while filtering out larger air particles more efficiently *and* it works with the average HVAC system. That means MERV-13 filters are usually the highest-rated filter upgrade possible without requiring costly system updates. Overall, a huge win-win-win. You want the workplace you frequent to have the [best air filter](#) it can, similar to how you likely choose the best face mask for health and safety.

Promoting Good Workplace Indoor Air Quality

The role of our built environment has never been more important, and your workplace is no different. If you are an employee concerned about returning to work, make sure to ask your employer exactly what they are doing to improve indoor air quality. Find out what steps the office building has taken to provide a

healthier and cleaner workplace. Or, if you are an employer, take OSHA's recommendations seriously. Ensuring an improved workspace with good office air [ventilation, filtration and air quality](#) will make the transition back to in-person work easier.