

hlw



# Taking Pause:

Healthy places today, tomorrow, and in the future





**HLW is one of the oldest continuously operating architectural firms in the United States. Established in 1885, we have adapted to a changing world over the decades. Resiliency is in our DNA.**

**As we approach these uncertain times, we will to continue to pause, ask questions, and move thoughtfully to serve our clients.**



**We are naturally curious, but we are skeptical of the white noise that can clutter our attention with empty promises and advice that won't endure the next news cycle."**

**Since February 2020, we have all experienced the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. During this time, our firm's priorities remain steadfast. We are focusing on the health and safety of our people (our employees, our clients and partners, and our communities) and continued delivery of world class design.**

**Undoubtedly, COVID-19 has changed the way we think about and approach the design of the built environment – particularly our homes, offices, and cities. This is why our firm's values remain as important as ever during this time. Here is what we mean:**

#### **QUESTION THE NORM**

We regularly monitor trends, data, facts, and insights to inform our work, but we don't make knee-jerk decisions that aren't in the long-term interest of our clients or our business. We are naturally curious, but we are skeptical of the white noise that can clutter our attention with empty promises and advice that won't endure the next news cycle. We are a research-based design firm, and we rigorously evaluate credible resources as we provide advice and solutions to our clients and to the community.

#### **DESIGN WITH PASSION**

Every one of us wants to return to normal as soon as is safely possible. The extended time away from our offices is providing us with the space to reflect on new design-driven ideas to help facilitate this safe return and to ensure continued thriving once we are back to (new) normal. In the meantime, our work continues with just as much passion as ever. We are adept at engaging with our clients through virtual means. We have quickly designed new tools that enable us to virtually facilitate engaging work sessions with our clients. We are continuously iterating new ways of delivering our work as flexibly as possible. We know our clients are experiencing the same challenges, so we are offering all of our services with the mutual understanding that flexibility is key to a productive working relationship during this time.

#### **BUILD WHAT'S NEXT**

We are regularly discussing what the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak mean for the future of our built environment. Some solutions will be short-term and temporary, while others will be longterm and possibly permanent. We are working with our clients to determine what this means for them. Solutions will range in scale and complexity. We may see changes in the designs of building air handling systems, sanitary features of core bathrooms, and surface materials. Planning metrics, seating ratios, and design strategies may change. We work with clients across the world and across industries and sectors. We will draw from our interdisciplinary knowledge base and apply best practices where feasible while also recognizing that one-size-fits-all solutions are seldom realistic.

HLW has been in business since 1885. We are one of the oldest continuously operating architectural practices in the United States. Our partnership has weathered numerous changes, disruptions, and business cycles throughout this rich history. Our resiliency as a firm is a testament to the values we embrace as we continue to do the best work we can for our clients, which shape our world, our cities, and our immediate communities.

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic throughout the world has sharply altered the workplace landscape.

Assessing engagement today and planning for a transition back to work has become increasingly critical to organizations.

At HLW, we are looking at our response to the pandemic through different lenses.



## Design

How will we re-imagine our schools, offices, cities, and other aspects of the built environment?



## Business

How are businesses, including their people and culture, adapting to change?



## Health

What changes can be made to the built environment to improve health and well-being?



## Policy

What organizational or institutional changes will ensure that we all thrive in the future?



## Technology

What tools are facilitating change and helping our clients succeed?



# Return to Work Spectrum

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**0.**  
**Today**



**1.**  
**Individuals at Work**



**2.**  
**Teams at Work**



**3.**  
**Post-Vaccine**

We're studying the challenges and opportunities employees face while working remotely, so we can begin to understand what operational changes can be made to improve employee engagement and strengthen remote work.

As individuals return to the workplace, behavioral and operational changes are paramount in the short-term.

Employees need timely and clear communication from leadership to understand and prepare for the changes ahead. Day-to-day operations will adjust as staff return to the office.

As new guidance becomes available some teams will begin gradually returning to the workplace.

Changes in technology and workplace infrastructure will support our new ways of working - and new expectations at work.

While some interim measures may ultimately recede, many lessons learned from this pandemic will embed themselves into the workplace permanently. New regulation around building code or mechanical systems, and new approaches to real estate, may change the workplace permanently.

## Long Term Considerations

**While many organizations struggle to address the interim impact of COVID-19 and how they will eventually bring workers back into the office, there are long term considerations that may ultimately have an impact on the planning and design of workplaces in the future.**



## **LAWS AND ORDINANCES MANDATING DEDENSIFICATION:**

Many European countries already have regulations that limit the distance employees can sit from windows to ensure access to natural light for all. Limitations on work point density could ultimately decrease capacity across sites in the long term. These regulations could even extend to workstation configuration – mandating companies move away from face-to-face rows of workstations in favor of staggered setups.

## **MECHANICAL SYSTEMS AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY:**

Many of our clients (particularly in the tech sector) place a great deal of emphasis on indoor air quality (or IAQ) for their employees. There has been increased emphasis on how sophisticated mechanical systems may play a role in limiting the spread of future pathogens. This could include limiting air recirculation to ‘disinfecting’ it with UV light before circulating air within the building.<sup>1</sup> In addition, maintaining levels of humidity between 40%-60% is the proven range for limiting the survivability of certain airborne pathogens.<sup>2</sup> These technologies often require additional energy, however, and can be at odds with energy efficiency standards, and ultimately, building sustainability.

## **NEW APPROACHES TO PORTFOLIO PLANNING:**

The COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly accelerated adoption of mobility and remote working that will ultimately continue post-vaccine. Inevitably, real estate executives are asking the question “Do we need this much space?”. New approaches – like hub and spoke systems of sites rather than ‘everyone under one roof’ maybe provide better resiliency in the long term while allowing organizations to limit their real estate footprint. This may also mean building more robust technology infrastructure to enable mobility while maintaining workplace effectiveness.

Coworking and other flexible real estate solutions could offer organizations a way to pilot these different concepts in the short-term, which may influence the long-term allocation of space across a portfolio.

(1) S. Sattar, N. Bhardwaj, & M. Ijaz (2016). “Airborne viruses” In M. Yates (Ed.), Manual of Environmental Microbiology (4th Ed.) (chapter 3.2.7). Washington DC: ASM Press.

(2) Noti, J. D., Blachere, F. M., McMillen, C. M., Lindsley, W. G., Kashon, M. L., Slaughter, D. R., & Beezhold, D. H. (2013). “High humidity leads to loss of infectious influenza virus from simulated coughs.” PloS One, 8 (2). Accessed online at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3583861/>



## OFFICES AS LEARNING CENTERS, NOT WORK CENTERS?

If we look at the activities that will ultimately bring people back to offices, individual task-based work is not at the top of the list in the post-COVID world. Can offices begin to transform into places for knowledge diffusion in other ways - training centers, skill-building, simulators, or new programs, for example.

## OFFICE AS THE LAST LINE OF DEFENSE

In most cases, the human immune system is the body's best line of defense against infectious disease.<sup>3</sup> As we move through cities and the various spaces across them, while interacting with others, we encounter a range of bacteria and pathogens that strengthen our individual and collective immunity. However, this same mechanism is problematic when an untreatable illness invades the system. During these times, our built environment can help keep us safe. For organizations that require a shared presence of workers during these times, the office can be a last line of defense against illness.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the other strategies outlined here, well-proven practices such as frequent hand washing, general surface cleanliness, and personal hygiene are effective ways to limit the spread of disease in any indoor setting. Basic infrastructure such as indoor plumbing and the sanitary design of core toilets already plays a role in keeping us healthy in shared spaces.


During these times, our built environment can help keep us safe. For organizations that require a shared presence of workers the office is a last line of defense against illness.



(3) "How your amazing immune system protects you from infection: Understanding how it works can help you stay healthy." Accessed online from the Cleveland Clinic: <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/q-amazing-immune-system-protects-health/>

(4) L. Dietz, P. Horve, D. Coil, M. Fretz & K. Van Den Wymelenberg (2020). "2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak: A review of the current literature and built environment (BE) considerations to reduce transmission. Accessed online at preprints.org: <https://www.preprints.org/manuscript/202003.0197/v3>



An aerial, top-down view of a busy pedestrian crosswalk on a city street. The crosswalk consists of several white stripes on a dark asphalt surface. Numerous people of various ages and ethnicities are captured in mid-stride, crossing the street. Some are carrying bags, some are pushing a stroller, and others are holding objects like a red balloon or a box. The scene is dynamic and captures a moment of everyday urban life.

**Question the norm.  
Design with passion.  
Build what's next.**

# hlw

Architecture | Interiors | Planning | Strategy | Sustainability



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