



COVID-19 REOPENING GUIDANCE FOR INDOOR MOVIE THEATERS

UPDATED ON OCTOBER 23, 2020

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

The purpose of this document is to provide clear guidance for the creation of a COVID-19 Site-Specific Protection Plan for indoor movie theaters and for this activity to resume in a manner that provides a safe, clean environment for movie theater operators, staff/employees, suppliers, third-party providers, and patrons/customers.

Contact COVIDRecovery@acgov.org if you have questions or require technical assistance. For business resources, visit <https://covid-19.acgov.org/recovery>.

NOTE: The [Alameda County Reopening Plan](#) is in alignment with the [State's Blueprint for a Safer Economy](#) in addition to the [State's Family Entertainment Centers](#), but there will be areas where Alameda County is more restrictive than the State. The more restrictive guidance prevails. This guidance and requirements are subject to change at any time based on updated State and County guidelines.

BUSINESS REQUIREMENTS

1. Prepare and implement a [COVID-19 Site Specific Protection Plan](#) based on local and State industry guidance.
2. Train employees on COVID-19 prevention, symptom screening, face coverings, and importance of physical distancing and frequent handwashing. Review the [State's COVID-19 Employer Playbook](#).
3. Implement symptom screening for all employees and do not allow employees who exhibit symptoms to come to work. Screening tools are available under Tools and Resources for Businesses at <https://covid-19.acgov.org/recovery>.
4. Develop and implement cleaning and disinfecting protocols in the Site-Specific Protection Plan.
5. Establish physical distancing guidelines and document in the Site-Specific Protection Plan.
6. Ensure compliance with the [Alameda County Face Covering Order](#) by all persons in your place of business, including, but not limited to, staff, suppliers, third-party providers, and patrons.
7. Both movie theater operators and patrons will be required to wear a face covering—including during all times on the premises—unless they are specifically exempted from the face covering requirements in [Health Officer Order No. 20-13](#), updated on June 5, 2020 or comply with specific requirements set forth below.
8. Movie theater concession areas are allowed to open for indoor food and beverage service. Movie theater operators must comply with the [Alameda County Department of Environmental Health Restaurant Operating Procedures During COVID-19](#).

9. Comply with guidance issued by the [California Blueprint for a Safer Economy](#), all [Local Health Officer Orders](#), and applicable federal, California, and local provisions for paid sick leave for individuals who cannot safely work for reasons related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
10. “Movie Theater Operators” means operators and facilities that provide theatrical exhibition of motion picture films or movies.

HEALTH AND SAFETY REQUIREMENTS

In addition to preparing, posting, and implementing the [COVID-19 Site-Specific Protection Plan](#) required by the Order, each owner, operator, manager, or supervisor of an indoor movie theater must address each item below.

1. Section 1 – Capacity Restrictions

- 1.1. Indoor movie theaters are allowed to open indoors on a limited basis and with modified operations. Only films, recorded performances, and live streamed performances may be show on a screen. No live, in-person performances are allowed at this time.
- 1.2. Indoor movie theaters can open up to a maximum 25% capacity per screen or 100 occupants (excluding staff), whichever is less.
- 1.3. Monitor and enforce capacity limits, taking into account the six feet physical distancing requirements. Track the number of persons entering and exiting. Consider using wristbands or other tools to help track capacity.
- 1.4. If capacity is reached, form a queue with clearly designated signage to ensure at least six feet of physical distance. Consider using signs, floor labels, barriers, stanchions, or other structures to designate queue area.
- 1.5. All patrons must have their seats assigned before entering the theater auditorium. The seats in every theater auditorium should be numbered. Theater staff should use a reservation or seating chart (electronic or paper) to assign seating.
- 1.6. Seating must be arranged in a “checkerboard” style to assure patrons maintain at least six feet of distance in all directions from patrons who are not part of their household. Members of the same household may be seated together but should maintain at least six feet of distance from other households.
 - 1.6.1. This spacing may require two or more empty rows of separation between each person or household in front and behind, to maintain a minimum of six feet of physical distance.
 - 1.6.2. This spacing may require multiple empty seats between each person or household on either side to maintain a minimum of six feet of physical distance.
- 1.7. Limit household group sizes to no more than 6 people.

1.8. Limit the duration of showings whenever reasonable. Do not show double features at this time. Prohibit patrons from purchasing tickets for multiple shows on the same day.

1.8.1. Consider limiting the time of trailers.

1.8.2. Pre-showing entertainment is prohibited.

1.9. To minimize the time spent inside and avoid unnecessary queuing, require patrons to arrive no more than 30 minutes before show times and make provisions for individuals with mobility issues.

1.10. Unless required for queuing before a movie, prohibit patrons from gathering before and after show times. Develop a plan for staggering or limiting show times and controlling patron paths of travel to eliminate crowding in common areas.

1.11. Limit the number of patrons using the elevator to accommodate physical distancing.

2. Section 2 – Mandatory Signage Requirements

2.1. Display a set of clearly visible health, hygiene, and safety rules for staff and patrons at the entrance and throughout the facility; and whenever possible, these rules must also be available online and visible on ticketing websites, in various languages where appropriate, that include, but are not limited to, instructions on:

2.1.1. Stay at home if sick;

2.1.2. Wearing facial coverings;

2.1.3. Washing hands or use hand sanitizer;

2.1.4. Maintain at least six feet of physical distance;

2.1.5. Avoid unnecessary touching of surfaces; and

2.1.6. Guidance for entering and exiting the theater.

2.2. Include similar information in announcements, both audio and visual, for the preview reel providing COVID-19 safety guidance for theater patrons.

3. Section 3 – Ventilation

3.1. Involve facility managers, building engineers, and heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (HVAC) system professionals to reduce COVID-19 airborne exposures in buildings by optimizing ventilation and filtration. Follow the recommendations of the [American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers \(ASHRAE\)](#).

3.2. Make any necessary improvements to the ventilation of the premises, including to HVAC systems. Any changes to the building configuration e.g., partitions, occupancy, HVAC system, and supplemental equipment such as exhaust fans and portable air cleaners with high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters to control the spread of COVID-19 through indoor air, must be checked and implemented by a qualified HVAC or indoor air quality professional. If HVAC systems are present:

3.2.1. Ensure HVAC systems are serviced and functioning properly.

- 3.2.2. Thoroughly clean and disinfect the HVAC system and building surfaces.
 - 3.2.3. Operate the HVAC system in occupied mode before reopening the facility. Evaluate running the building ventilation system even when the building is unoccupied to maximize ventilation. At the minimum, reset timer-operated ventilation systems so that they start operating one to two hours before the building opens and two to three hours after the building is closed.
 - 3.2.4. Evaluate possibilities for upgrading air filters to the highest efficiency possible.
 - 3.2.5. Adjust the HVAC system to increase outside air to the indoor spaces to 100% or the maximum allowable per air handling unit.
 - 3.2.6. Use outdoor air quality sensors or reliable web-based data for outdoor pollution information as part of the new/modified ventilation operation.
 - 3.2.7. Maintain indoor comfort according to the design temperature and relative humidity. According to the [World Health Organization \(WHO\) guidance](#), avoid setting climate control systems to “cold” low temperatures (below 70°F) and “dry” low humidity settings (below 40%). ASHRAE recommends a maximum indoor relative humidity of 60%.
 - 3.2.8. Increase the percentage of outdoor air through the HVAC system, readjusting or overriding recirculation (“economizer”) dampers.
 - 3.2.9. Disable demand-control ventilation controls that reduce air supply based on temperature or occupancy.
 - 3.2.10. Treat return air and/or supply air to indoor spaces via mechanical filtration. Apply the highest Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) filtration level the HVAC units will allow. ASHRAE recommends a minimum of MERV 13 and MERV 14 or higher is preferred, if the equipment can accommodate pressure drop.
 - 3.2.11. Consider installing portable air cleaners (“HEPA filters”) with the highest filtration level possible.
- 3.3. Increase natural ventilation by opening windows and doors when environmental conditions and building requirements allow.
 - 3.4. If the establishment uses pedestal fans or hard mounted fans, adjust the direction of fans to minimize air blowing from one individual’s space to another’s space.
 - 3.5. In restrooms, maximize ventilation and minimize crowding and touching of common surfaces by, for example, opening windows and doors when environmental conditions and building requirements allow, closing every other sink, stall, urinal, and posting signage establishing a maximum capacity for restrooms with clearly marked and distanced queueing areas.

4. Section 4 – Setting Up the Premises

- 4.1. Ticket lines and ticket vending machines must be configured to ensure that physical distancing of at least six feet is maintained at all times.
 - 4.1.1. Consider moving ticket machines or using tape, stickers, signage, stanchions, or barriers to ensure physical distancing requirements are met as patrons and staff

move about the premises.

- 4.2. Prepare to minimize contact between patrons and staff.
 - 4.2.1. Use prepaid ticketing or contactless payment systems wherever possible, such as online or via phone.
 - 4.2.2. If paper tickets are used, the staff person collecting them should wear appropriate personal protective equipment, including a face covering, and disposable gloves.
 - 4.2.3. Use impermeable physical barriers, such as Plexiglas, to separate staff from patrons at the ticket window.
- 4.3. Make hand washing stations and/or sanitizer available in high-traffic locations like entrances, exits, and near elevators and restrooms. Touch-free hand sanitizer dispensers should be installed where possible.
- 4.4. Where feasible, establish separate exits from the entrances to reduce contact points and patrons returning to common areas and narrow aisles and hallways.
 - 4.4.1. If separate entrances and exits are not feasible, mark a different path for ingress and for egress, e.g. “enter here” and “exit here” signs. Consider using barriers.
- 4.5. Close all common areas where people may gather and that are not necessary for access to the theater. Remove or block off furniture or attractions in lobbies, lounges, entertainment spaces, or arcades. Take steps to prevent gathering in enclosed spaces, such as hallways and stairwells. Theaters should establish pathways and separators to allow social distancing at concessions sales and distribution.
- 4.6. Consider installing touch-free water fountains or bottle filling stations to minimize contact between staff and theatergoers.
- 4.7. Use of staff break rooms should be limited. Reconfigure these spaces to encourage physical distancing. Limit the number of personnel in a breakroom at any one time to ensure distancing can be maintained. Clean and disinfect countertops and tables between uses.
- 4.8. Modify or restrict the use or restrict the number of workstations and worker seating areas so that individuals are at least six feet apart in all directions (e.g. side-to-side and when facing one another) and are not sharing workstations without cleaning and disinfection between use.
 - 4.8.1. When distancing is not feasible between workstations, provide and require the use of impermeable physical barriers, like Plexiglas shielding walls, in areas where they would not affect air flow.

- 4.9. Check for pest infestation or harborage, and make sure all pest control measures are functioning.
- 4.10. If your business was closed for a long period of time, flush out the stagnant water from the plumbing lines by running water through fixtures.
- 4.11. Consider reconfiguring parking lots to limit congregation points and ensure proper separation (e.g. closing every other space).

5. Section 5 – Protecting Staff and Patron Health

- 5.1. Designate staff to monitor COVID-19 safety and to ensure that staff and patrons are following all safety guidelines. Designate staff to remove staff, patrons, and anyone who declines to follow guidelines. Remind patrons to minimize talking in the theater and to refrain from talking loudly and singing.
- 5.2. Require that everyone wear a face covering upon entry and at all times.
- 5.3. Require that everyone use hand sanitizer upon entry.
- 5.4. Place hand sanitizing stations, touchless if possible, throughout the premises. Sanitizing stations should be monitored frequently, at least every hour, and maintained as needed.
- 5.5. Conduct screening of all patrons upon arrival. Patrons who do not pass the screening must be refused service. Review the [Screening Guidance for Employers](#).
 - 5.5.1. Consider using a poster or other large-format version of the form/site/guidelines to review the questions with people verbally.
- 5.6. Remind patrons to enter and exit the theater auditorium while maintaining at least six feet of physical distancing. Wherever possible, direct patrons to leave via alternate exits after their show or avoid going back into the lobby or common areas altogether.
- 5.7. Instruct patrons to remain in their assigned seats for the duration of the movie except to use the restroom or to purchase concessions. Ensure that patrons do not use seats other than those assigned to them.
- 5.8. Prop or hold doors open during peak periods when attendees are entering and exiting facilities, if possible and in accordance with security and safety protocols.
- 5.9. Be prepared to assist public health authorities in potential contact tracing efforts. Retain the schedules of all staff. Consider encouraging use of patron loyalty programs and retaining the credit card information of patrons to facilitate contact tracing efforts. Any lists maintained for contact tracing purposes should be properly discarded after

three weeks.

6. Section 6 – Disinfection Requirements

- 6.1. Disinfect auditoriums and each previously occupied seat between movie screenings and before the next group of patrons are permitted to enter an auditorium.
 - 6.1.1. Consider using seat maps of patrons after a screening to help target this activity.
 - 6.1.2. Consider using disposable or washable seat covers between each user, particularly on porous surfaces (for example, fabric cover cushioned chairs) that are difficult to properly clean.
- 6.2. Perform thorough cleaning in high traffic areas such as waiting areas and lobbies, staff break rooms, etc., and areas of ingress and egress, including stairways and elevator banks.
- 6.3. High-touch surfaces, including counters, credit card machines, touchscreens, buttons, doorknobs, etc. should be disinfected frequently, once per hour. High-touch areas should be disinfected once per hour on a predetermined schedule and monitored by management to ensure compliance.
- 6.4. Disinfect restrooms, at least every four hours, in addition to cleaning high-touch surfaces in restrooms every hour.
- 6.5. Recommendations on properly disinfecting surfaces:
 - 6.5.1. Read and follow product label instructions for required protective equipment, may include gloves, long sleeves, and eye protection to protect the users.
 - 6.5.2. Choose EPA-registered disinfectants that are approved for COVID-19. A complete list of EPA-approved products can be found at <https://cfpub.epa.gov/giwiz/disinfectants/index.cfm>.
 - 6.5.3. If concentrates must be used, follow dilution directions carefully and wear eye protection and gloves. Follow label directions for products which require dilution. Measure, rather than "eye estimate" both the concentrate and the water; some suppliers have "Metered Dispensing Systems," which automate the measuring process. Clearly label all containers with diluted products.
 - 6.5.4. Using too much product does not improve its performance and can create hazards for both the user and others who come into contact with treated surfaces.
 - 6.5.4.1. In the case of chlorine bleach, please note that for COVID-19, the CDC specifies a different concentration of bleach than is used for other applications. See <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/global-covid-19/make-chlorine-solution.html>.
 - 6.5.5. EPA-approved disinfectants require a minimum contact time to be effective against the human coronavirus, and the disinfectant must be left on the surface for a certain

amount of time before being wiped off.

- 6.6. If staff are required to wear equipment such as radios, headsets, or earpieces, these must be designated for a specific individual and not shared. If sharing this equipment is unavoidable, protocols must be developed by the theater operator to ensure they are cleaned and disinfected between each use according to manufacturer's suggested cleaning instructions.
- 6.7. If items are handed out to patrons, such as 3D glasses and assisted audio devices, these should either be single use or establish protocols to ensure disinfection between uses.

7. Section 7 – Food and Beverages

- 7.1. Any food and beverage operations must comply with the [Alameda County Restaurant Operating Procedures](#).
- 7.2. If a movie theater has a bar or bar area, it must remain closed for patron use.
- 7.3. Face coverings may be removed for the limited purpose and limited time period necessary to consume food and beverages, if approved by state and local health authorities.
 - 7.3.1. When patrons are purchasing food, concessions staff must remind the patron they must keep their face covering on during the movie and may only remove it to consume their food or beverage.
 - 7.3.2. No food or beverages are to be consumed in any area that does not provide sufficient space to ensure physical distancing can be maintained.
- 7.4. Those responsible for preparing and distributing food must clean their hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer before beginning food preparation or distribution and regularly thereafter.
- 7.5. All local public health regulations regarding preparing and distributing food must be followed, including safe food temperatures and use of appropriate food service personal protective equipment such as hairnets and gloves, etc.
- 7.6. Minimize the number of staff involved in preparing and distributing food to limit the number of persons inside the premises and to ensure proper physical distancing.
- 7.7. Communal food, condiments, condiment caddies, straws, napkins, etc., that require shared serving utensils or equipment should be eliminated, offered via touchless technology, or provided by appropriately trained employees.
- 7.8. Consider options for patrons to place orders ahead of time, such as mobile ordering, to minimize the amount of time they must wait in line.
- 7.9. Install impermeable physical barriers, such as Plexiglas, between cashiers, concession workers, and patrons where physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- 7.10. Minimize cash transactions and encourage credit cards or contactless payments whenever

possible.

8. Section 8 – Additional Considerations

- 8.1. Consider designating specific show times for vulnerable populations, e.g. those over 50 years of age or with chronic health conditions.
- 8.2. Explore options to minimize the number of patrons in an auditorium, for example allowing persons from the same household to rent out an entire auditorium.
- 8.3. Flu vaccines are critical in the fight against COVID-19 by keeping communities healthy and reducing strain on our healthcare systems that are responding to COVID-19. Consider encouraging all staff to get a flu shot and posting signage to encourage flu vaccine among patrons and visitors.