

COVID-19 aftermath: Safe return to the office during the pandemic

Issue/problem

COVID-19 has affected almost all aspects of our human activity globally. Changing our working norm is one of them. This project explored strategies and control measures that could be adopted in different countries for preventing or limiting the transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in indoor office workplaces, focusing on space and the well-being of workers.

Description of the problem

Research took place in May-July 2020. Methods used comprised both systematic and narrative literature reviews as well as stakeholder consultations with executives involved in the office supply chain. Suggestions were split in: a) top-down suggestions, i.e. governmental and NGO guidance and b) bottom-up guidance, generated by industry. Surface contaminated? Protocols to reduce the psychological stress of employees returning to work, ventilation and virus transmission were indicative the questions along with a broader series of aspects involving employee wellbeing.

Results (effects/changes)

Results were organised under four themes: a) advice on surface interactions and virus viability; b) behavioural advice focusing on the return-to-work effects on the psychological state of workers along with control measures; c) suggestions on preparing buildings to return-to-work during the pandemic and study of indoor environment parameters and their effect on office workers and d) advice on thermal and ventilation conditions and virus transmission.

Lessons

The public health effect of COVID-19 on workspace is more relevant than ever globally as people return to work. This review demonstrated the complexity of decision making and the series of conflicting priorities that arose, especially infection control vs employee mental health or increased business costs for modifications during economic recession. The necessity of future studies focusing on interdisciplinary knowledge arose.

Main messages (Write two short (200 characters maximum) messages which summarize the main impact of your work)

1. Focusing not only on practical steps preparing office buildings but on the mental health of office workers and how this transition back to work in such a stressful period can be easier
2. Lessons learned from medical architecture and it's applicability on office spaces (?)

3 Keywords: indoor office workplaces, SARS-CoV-2 virus, transmission prevention