

Wear a mask.



Back to the Office Series - Part One

After two long years of lock downs and remote work, people are returning to the office, despite the lingering presence of COVID and periodic waves. This series will summarize perspectives about navigating the transition back into the workplace, based on BOMA Toronto's learnings from our team, our members, our Return to Workplace Committee, our HVAC Advisory Council and other external stakeholders.

Part One of the series looks specifically at the office buildings many of us are returning to.

One of the biggest shifts we've seen from COVID is that people have become more aware of their surroundings and the spaces they occupied in two distinct ways - we are now more focused on the air we breath and our proximity to others. Whereas work-from-home offered a strong sense of control over our indoor environment, it can't duplicate the same line of sight for engagement in the office and what it means for a healthy return to work.



Our position throughout the pandemic has been, and continues to be, adherence to guidance from Toronto Public Health and Provincial policy. We also note, that most guidance focused on social measures (capacity limits, closing venues) and personal measures (masking, isolation) rather than building operations or capital requirements. But this doesn't mean that buildings don't have a significant impact on reduced transmission risk or that the real estate industry hasn't been incredibly active.

Since early in the pandemic BOMA Toronto has convened a working group where members could disseminate and discuss operational best practices and the effective implementation of policy. We have seen the development of [HVAC guidance](#) the adoption of enhanced cleaning, and the roll out of communications. As our team started its return to work journey a key resource was our communications with our landlord Cadillac Fairview. CF, like many industry leaders provided us, as a tenant, with a robust information package about their [COVID management strategies](#) and was responsive to detailed questions that helped us with our preparation plans. For tenants, the best place to start is with your property manager - what measures are being taken, and what key details including cleaning of high touch surfaces, enhanced air filtration (MERV 13 filters or better), and increased outdoor air supply are being addressed.

With the understanding of what was happening in the base building, questions linger: how we use our own space and what measures could we implement ourselves? Should we set capacity limits on our meeting rooms? What is the impact of portable air cleaners? Do we need to wear masks in our offices? And, how effective are these measures with emerging variants?

Fortunately, there has been some incredible innovations to help develop evidence-based strategies for indoor spaces like offices, malls and public buildings. These include air tracing tests that help determine how air flows through a space, and where concentration

of contaminants may occur along with numerous studies on the effectiveness of everything from masks to air cleaning devices, and improved data on local infection rates and transmissibility of variants. Filtering all this information into office policy is a challenge with its own set of solutions.

Real estate firms are taking a leadership role in this space.

A recently announced project by BOMA Toronto member BentallGreenOak is deploying ParticleOne, a platform developed by Canadian Engineering Company RWDI, that provides data-driven COVID transmission [risk assessment at the property level](#). BGO's implementation allows them to make more refined, risk-mitigated decisions, and to better support tenants to balance their return-to-work and health and safety objectives.

BOMA Toronto had the chance to test the ParticleOne platform in our own office to better understand our risk, right down to individual rooms/space types accounting for current community spread and variant in Toronto. Seeing lists of actions that we could take and their relative impacts helped us communicate with our staff and make more informed decisions about which measures we should pursue. We also feel more prepared for future waves.

Examples of industry leadership like this demonstrate that real-estate companies can play a central role in helping keep tenants safe and healthy not only from COVID, but future pandemics and environmental pollutants such as smog or wildfire smoke that is increasingly a public health concern.

We are all partners in pandemic recovery. Individuals will continue to bear responsibility for personal safety choices like wearing a high-quality mask and social distancing when possible, but our buildings are helping to provide a layered defense with their operational best-practice operations and providing the tools to make informed choices.

ON BEHALF OF OUR MEMBERSHIP, BOMA TORONTO THANKS ALL THE COUNCIL MEMBERS FOR VOLUNTEERING THEIR TIME TO SHARE THEIR EXPERTISE AND INSIGHTS TO HELP US WITH THIS IMPORTANT MISSION



For additional information, contact:

Jeff Ranson
Senior Director, Energy, Environment & Advocacy
jranson@bomatoronto.org

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Toronto

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