Common areas and amenities

Because COVID-19 is most often spread person-to-person, shared spaces such as meeting/conference rooms, lounges, break rooms, and shared kitchens can contribute to the spread of COVID-19 on our campuses. The following provisions are intended to help lower the chances of catching and spreading COVID-19 in such locations.

Overview

In accordance with guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and regulations and executive orders issued by the State of Rhode Island, use of campus common areas is restricted as described below, and those using such spaces are responsible for taking precautions against the spread of COVID-19. Current Rhode Island Department of Health regulations require that employee break rooms be closed except for purposes of storing food.

Definitions

**Break room.** A room in a workplace that is set aside for employees to use during a break from work, as to relax, socialize, or eat meals/snacks.

**Common Area.** An area available for simultaneous use by multiple building occupants including, though not limited to, lounges, break rooms, meeting/conference rooms, and shared kitchens. For purposes of these guidelines, common areas do not include hallways, stairwells, bathrooms, or dining halls.

General provisions

All campus common areas must be prepared in accordance with the current URI COVID-19 Building Reopening Guide. This includes:

- Capacity of break rooms should be no more than one or two people at a time; occupancy of other types of common areas is restricted based on square footage and furniture layout as outlined in the Reopening Guide.
- Posting signage regarding capacity, hand hygiene, face covering requirements, etc.
- Eliminating as many commonly touched items as possible (see Shared Kitchen Amenities below).
- Disabling or removing water fountains, dispensers, etc. (Touchless water bottle fillers are, however, permitted in all locations except fitness/athletic facilities and dining halls.)

Face coverings are required in common areas at all times. See Face Coverings for additional guidance.

Shared kitchen amenities

The only permitted appliances in break rooms and shared kitchens are microwave ovens, refrigerators, stoves, and single-serving coffee makers (i.e. Keurig.) Other devices such as toasters, coffee pots, water dispensers (unless touchless) must be removed and stored elsewhere.

Disposable dishes, cups, and eating utensils are preferred; non-disposable items should be eliminated from break rooms and shared kitchens as much as possible. Individuals should be strongly discouraged from
sharing these items if present. If condiments are available in the kitchen, they should preferably be provided in individually packaged, single-use packaging including items such as salt and pepper.

**Using common areas**

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, use of common areas should be reduced as much as possible. The size and frequency of in-person meetings should be limited by using alternative means such as videoconferencing. *Food may not be consumed in common areas and any type of in-person celebration is expressly prohibited.* (For more information regarding events, please see Campus Events.)

**Residence hall kitchens**

Residence hall kitchens are available for residents’ use for heating food and similar purposes, subject to the same provisions outlined above for Shared Kitchen Amenities including responsibility for sanitizing after each use. Housing and Residential Life will issue additional guidelines and requirements for use of residence hall lounges as needed.

**Residence hall lounges**

Designated lounges within each residence hall are available for resident use. Posted occupancy limits must be observed at all times and all individuals in lounges must remain at least 6 feet apart. Face coverings must be worn at all times except while actively consuming food and must be reapplied immediately thereafter. Housing and Residential Life will issue additional guidelines and requirements for use of residence hall lounges as needed.

**Employee break rooms**

*In accordance with Rhode Island Department of Health regulations, use of employee break rooms for congregating with others or consuming food is prohibited* except as provided for in Exceptions below. Break rooms may only be accessed to store, retrieve, and prepare food.

Employees should eat meals and take breaks outdoors as weather permits or in their own workspaces as practical. When possible, supervisors should alternate or stagger break periods to reduce opportunities for gathering/congregation.

**Cleaning and disinfecting**

*Every person who uses a common area, particularly a break room or shared kitchen, is responsible for its cleaning and disinfecting after use.*

Sanitization supplies, like wipes for tables and hand sanitizer, must be available for individuals to use whenever they enter common areas and materials must be provided to disinfect all shared equipment and high-touch surfaces, like microwaves and refrigerators, after each use. See Cleaning and Disinfecting for additional guidance.

Used, non-disposable food service items should be handled with gloves and washed with dish soap and hot water or in a dishwasher. Supplies must be provided (i.e. dish soap, gloves, disinfectant wipes) for cleaning shared cooking utensils such as knives, ladles, spatulas, and shared appliances such as stoves, microwaves, coffee makers, and refrigerators. Alternatively, these items may be removed from the kitchen area and stored.
Exceptions

Availability of break rooms and shared kitchens is at the discretion of the responsible department or college, and these spaces may be closed if department/college leadership believes they cannot be safely monitored and maintained.

Where it is not feasible for individuals to eat or otherwise take breaks in a safe, alternative location inside or outside the building, a supervisor may, at their discretion, permit limited use of break rooms by employees in accordance with the other provisions outlined above. The supervisor is then responsible for monitoring appropriate use of the breakroom by their subordinates.

The above restrictions on use of kitchen spaces does not apply to spaces utilized by URI Dining or Spectra Venue Management, which are already subject to Rhode Island Department of Health food service regulations.