

Additional guidelines on social distancing and other preventive measures in offices

Friday, 13 March 2020 10:38 am

Dear colleagues,

Following our earlier messages to Unit Heads, we would like to provide some additional guidelines on social distancing and other preventive measures in the office environment.

There is no specific guideline of office social distancing issued by local or overseas Government or organizations. However, we can make reference to two documents issued by US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO), which define a social distance of **1 to 2 meters** for prevention against spread of COVID-19.

US CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/risk-assessment.html>

WHO: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

We recommend campus units to adopt the following approaches to ensure social distancing when resuming office operations.

Seating plan

An easy way to estimate distance between seats in office is by referring to the ceiling grids. Each grid in the Main Academic Building is 1.5 m by 1.5 m. So if you and your neighboring colleague are sitting one and a half ceiling grid away from each other, then you are more than 2 meters apart, which is considered an acceptable social distance by both US CDC and WHO standards. The small ceiling grid in LSKBB and IAS is 0.6 m in length, so you can adjust your estimation accordingly. Another way is to estimate by furniture dimensions. The standard office table is about 0.7 to 0.8 m in depth, so when two office tables are put against each other, the two seats would be 1.4-1.6 m apart.

Physical barrier

Walls, partitions and glass panels are all physical barrier that can prevent spread of droplets. In cases where distance between seats may not be adequate, physical barriers should be taken into consideration. Using the example above, two office tables facing each other with a partition in between would provide an adequate social distance.

Working by rota

In addition to seating plan and physical barrier, neighboring staff members may be asked to come in to work on different days.

Zoom meeting

Conducting internal and external meetings through Zoom, instead of in person, can further reduce social contact.

In addition to social distancing, **personal and environmental hygiene** should also be reinforced in offices. Please contact Mr Alan Mok of CMO Facilities Services to request at least one hand rub dispenser for common area of your office. Colleagues should also be reminded to regularly clean office common areas/items, such as reception counter, pantry, meeting rooms, and shared office equipment; and remember to clean their hands after touching or using those common areas/items. Colleagues should also wear a mask when in close contact with others, and when they are in a crowded place. People with a fever or respiratory symptoms should not come to work, they should wear a mask and see a doctor promptly.

HSEO staff have visited most of the campus offices in the past few days, and will continue to visit the remaining offices to help assess preventive measures, including social distancing. If you have questions about preventive measures, please feel free to discuss with HSEO colleagues who come to your office, or contact our Associate Director, Stephen Tsu at 2358 6522, email stephentsu@ust.hk, who is coordinating the campus preventive efforts.

Thank you for your cooperation, and let us all stay well!

Health, Safety and Environment Office