

Resuming Habitat operations and programs



The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has had — and continues to have — a profound human and financial toll around the world, overwhelming health systems and causing widespread social and economic disruption.

The virus has led to physical distancing, shutdowns and movement restrictions in virtually all areas where Habitat for Humanity works and serves. These measures have helped curtail the ability of the virus to spread, limiting some of its short-term impacts and buying time to identify and implement solutions for societies to return safely to a more normal way of living.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Habitat for Humanity has prioritized the health and safety of the people in the communities we serve, as well as those of the staff members, volunteers and partners who carry out our mission. As Habitat organizations consider steps to resume operations, safety must remain paramount in our decision-making.

Communities around the globe are now looking to transition away from restrictions in a manner that will continue to curtail the spread of COVID-19, balancing the socioeconomic benefits and epidemiological risk. In order for Habitat for Humanity International and its affiliated entities to continue operations and adapt to the new normal, we must ensure careful planning to minimize risks.

All Habitat for Humanity entities, regardless of location, should consider the following key areas when determining whether, when and how to resume operations and programs:

- Mandatory compliance with all national, state and local requirements and guidelines for operations (e.g., stay-at-home orders, physical distancing requirements, use of face masks and other PPE, and OSHA and other safety regulations).
- Level and trends in community disease transmission. (For example, current U.S. federal guidance calls for a phased resumption of operations only after 14 days of downward trajectory of new cases of COVID-19 in a community.)
- Capacity of local health systems to provide necessary care for COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 illness.
- Organizational readiness to minimize the risk of COVID-19 virus transmission within Habitat for Humanity offices, Habitat ReStores, building sites and project offices.
- Implementation of, adherence to and regular training on strict protocols for safety, including physical distancing, sanitation, PPE, health screening, staggered shifts and phased reopening.
- Available methods of safe transportation to the office or work site.
- Timing for schools and educational institutions to reopen.
- Ability to perform work remotely, particularly for individuals with increased vulnerability to COVID-19.
- Level of discomfort of staff members and others working in a communal environment.
- Implementation of policies and procedures for teleworking and family and medical leave.
- Ability to maintain continuity of operations.
- Cultivation of a spirit of personal responsibility to limit the impact of the pandemic.

Throughout this time, all Habitat for Humanity International offices and affiliated entities should maintain a posture of maximum flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances in their communities and within their operations.

HFHI has developed detailed guidance to assist its offices and affiliated entities in their decisions and plans for resumption of operations and programs, including construction activity, Habitat ReStore operations and offices. Additional guidance and resources are under development and will be made available as we continue to develop strategies and tactics to advance the Habitat mission during this pandemic.

We urge prudence over speed. Please remember that the actions a single Habitat affiliate takes will reflect on the entire organization. We all carry an important responsibility to steward our ministry with safe, sound and far-sighted decisions.