



By [Paul J. Gough](#) and [Natalie Kostelni](#) – Philadelphia Business Journal
Apr 8, 2021 Updated Apr 8, 2021, 3:13pm EDT

End of teleworking mandate hailed as 'positive step' for Philadelphia's economic recovery



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Pennsylvania and Philadelphia have lifted their mandates for many businesses to telework, with state officials now saying the practice is only "highly encouraged" as the commonwealth continues to make strides against Covid-19.

In easing its restrictions, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health recommends office workers continue to work at home when possible and has outlined a series of guidelines that must be followed when employees are in the office.

Some of those protocols involve requiring employees and visitors to wear masks with some exceptions, notably when someone is working alone in a separate office and as necessary to eat or drink. The city also continues to prohibit employees from eating together in a shared space such as a lunchroom or conference room among other measures.

The restrictions were eased on April 4 and are welcomed by Philadelphia landlords and economic development experts who view the return of office workers as certain to help reinvigorate Center City, its restaurants and retailers who have suffered during the pandemic.

"This is a very positive step by both the State and City to begin the process for a safe return to office buildings," said Paul Levy, president and CEO of Center City District. "Lots of health protocols need to remain in place, but when workers return to their desks, building security and cleaning personnel can again be gainfully employed and retailers and restaurants will get a huge boost from the foot traffic and spending by nearly 200,000 office, health care and other professionals who have grown weary of Zoom."

Brandywine Realty Trust, the largest owner of Class A office space in the Philadelphia region, has kept its buildings open throughout the pandemic and instituted a series of protocols to maintain the health and safety of its tenants and employees.

"As the largest landlord of Class A office space in the region, we know many organizations are eager to get back to collaborating and connecting in the physical office space," said Jerry Sweeney, CEO of Brandywine Realty (NYSE: BDN). "I am optimistic that the relaxation of the work-from-home mandate will help safely guide businesses across the city and the state toward an eventual full return to the workplace."

The teleworking mandate was one of the earliest and longest lasting Covid-19 mitigation measures, with Gov. [Tom Wolf](#) issuing an order shortly after the pandemic started requiring that all companies able to do so institute telework for employees. But with vaccinations increasing across the state, the administration had been under increasing pressure to remove that mandate.

In Philadelphia, the city said that as employees return to work, it is not necessary to conduct onsite temperature checks but that employers should instead screen for Covid symptoms. It is also requesting employers continue to promote social distancing and limit occupancy to two total persons for every 1,000 square feet. However, if working from home isn't feasible, "employees may continue to work with the density of people required for operations to continue," the city said. "This density should continue to be minimized to the greatest extent possible."

The easing of the telework mandate comes at the same time other statewide Covid-19 restrictions are being lifted, including Sunday's increases in occupancy at restaurants and gathering limits at indoor and outdoor events. Pennsylvania has also increased the pace of Covid-19 vaccinations and is set to open eligibility to anyone over the age of 16 in mid-April, a move just announced Wednesday.

"As we move forward, we are reminding Pennsylvanians that it is still imperative that they follow current personal mitigation efforts such as wearing a mask, maintaining social distance and following gathering and occupancy guidelines so we can protect public health while we jump-start our economy," said Acting Health Secretary [Alison Beam](#).

The state is still requiring businesses to comply with the masking, physical distancing and other measures as laid out by the Pennsylvania Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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