

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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COVID-19 Coronavirus FAQ

Ventilation Systems

Question: *Should we shut down the building ventilation system if someone in our building is suspected of having COVID-19 coronavirus infection?*

Answer: When operating properly according to American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) standards, the mechanical heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems routinely utilized in commercial buildings are set up to move, mix, and exhaust air in such a way as to dilute and filter indoor air contaminants, including viruses. Shutting off HVAC systems in commercial buildings disrupts this intentional dilution and filtering process and may actually increase risk of exposure of building occupants to infectious contaminants (such as COVID-19 coronavirus).

There are steps commercial building operators can take with respect to their buildings' ventilation systems to minimize the risk to occupants from the spread of viruses (including COVID-19 coronavirus). These steps include:

- 1) Ensuring that the air handling systems for all buildings are operating properly, continually, and without service interruptions
- 2) Verifying that appropriate air filters are installed in the ventilation systems and that those filters are routinely replaced according to the manufacturer's recommended schedule
- 3) Using air filters that have the highest MERV (Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value) rating that is compatible with the air handling system equipment
- 4) Adjusting and balancing ventilation system components, including mechanical air handlers, to ensure that the maximum allowable amount of outside air is being mixed into the recirculated air in the system to maximize dilution of any viral contaminants that may be present inside the building



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Helpful Resources:

MERV ratings explained (EPA site): <https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/what-merv-rating-1>

Building systems and coronavirus (Harvard School of Public Health via NY Times):
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/04/opinion/coronavirus-buildings.html>

ASHRAE resources for COVID-19: <https://www.ashrae.org/technical-resources/resources>