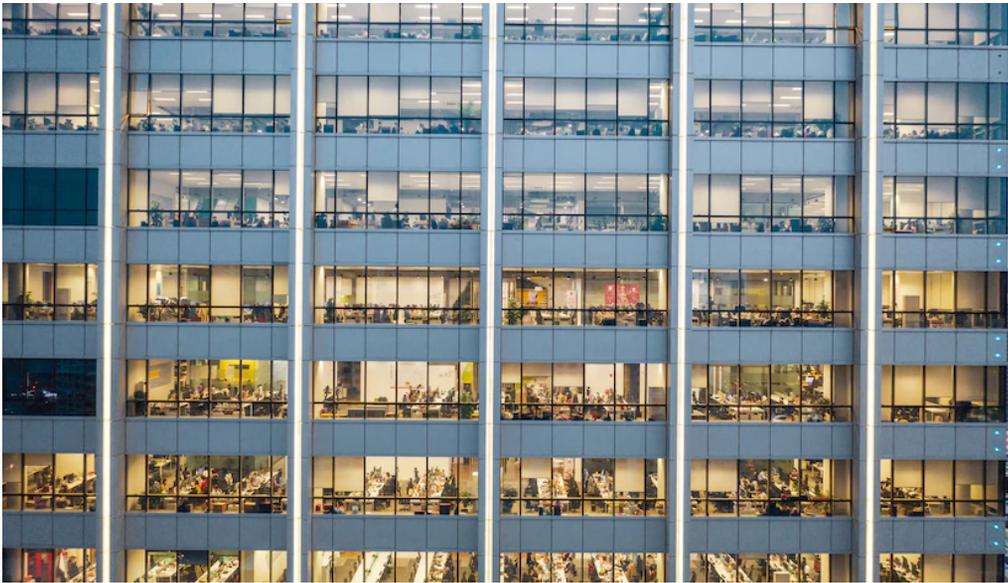


# Coronavirus restrictions lift but social distancing means the office won't be the same

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Long queues for lifts, a public transport nightmare and trouble over dirty kitchen dishes - COVID-19 restrictions may have lifted, but the office will not be the same.

Australia Square is one of the most well-known high-rise office buildings in Sydney.

It holds 2,500 to 2,800 workers at full capacity and has 16 lifts.

If every worker arrived back at 9am on Monday, it would take two to three hours to get everyone into their office with the current social distancing rules.

But not everyone can come back.

Modelling conducted by Ernst and Young shows no more than 50 per cent of a high rise office could be occupied with tenants observing social distancing requirements.



Office buildings will have to change to adhere to social distancing rules. Credit: RICHARD WAINWRIGHT/AAPIMAGE

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According to Dexus, the company that manages Australia Square, the number of workers who can go into the building at any one time is even lower.

“To observe appropriate social distancing in workspaces – four square metres per person – will mean circa 25-30 per cent of workforces returning under the current stage of restrictions,” said David Yates, Executive General Manager of Dexus.

Dexus has asked Australia Square tenants to stagger their start and finish times and their lunch breaks.

The lifts will be roped off and only three people will be allowed to enter at any one time.

**In the video below theatres may not open until 2021**





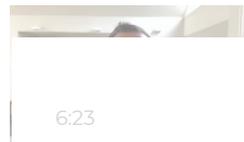
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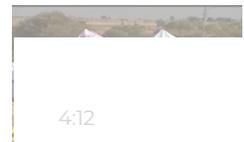
5yo body found after boat capsized



Kingscliff shark attack



NSW Deputy Premier critical of protest decision



WHO backflips on face masks

Aussie entertainer Todd McKenney believes it would be at least 12 months before theatres return to normal due to COVID-19

Employers are starting to realise the lifting of restrictions doesn't mean "business as usual".

Nina Mapson Bone is the managing director of Beaumont People, a recruitment consultancy that has been advising businesses on how to restructure their workplaces to cope with COVID-19.

She's also had to overhaul her own office spaces to ensure they are safe for work.



ANZ has installed thermal imaging at its Melbourne office. File image. Credit: 7NEWS

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“It’s really tricky,” she said.

“In our building, there are 42 floors and we are concerned about social distancing in the lift.”

“We have been in and measured our desks to see how far they are apart - luckily they are 1.5 metres.

“We have been in the meeting rooms and taken out chairs so you can’t fit too many people in.”

## Split shifts

Mapson Bone says many companies are considering split-shift systems to allow workers to have time in the office.

But they are struggling with the implications of that change.

“You can’t have teams sit together and you can’t have them hot desk because you don’t want someone sitting at your desk and spreading their germs,” she said.

“If you do go to a split-shift system you need to increase your cleaning, and suddenly you are paying more for cleaning at a time when businesses don’t have the extra cash.”

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Then there’s the kitchen - a sore spot for any HR manager at the best of times.

In the time of coronavirus, it's a nightmare.

"The kitchen has shared food. That's not a good idea at this point in time," Mapson Bone said.

"And in most offices you have those people who don't clean up after themselves - are you going to pick up other people's dirty plates?"

## **Worker anxiety**

More important than the physical spacing is the management of workers' mental health and preferences around the return to work.

"A chunk of workers will be desperate to get back to the office, a chunk never want to go back to the office now they have proven they can work from home," Mapson Bone said.

"Another chunk wants to do half-half and a further chunk may have an underlying condition or they don't want to be put in the position where they have to do their workmates in when they know they are socialising.

"There is a whole underlying anxiety issue to manage here."

## **Liability**

Several companies have also questioned their liability should someone contract coronavirus in the office.

"We have been asked 'If someone comes in and gets a case, will I end up in an inquiry like Ruby Princess?'" Mapson Bone said.

SafeWork Australia has issued guidelines for businesses preparing to return to the office.

Social distancing regulations are enforced by each state authority as part of workplace health and safety.

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