



The COVID-19 Pandemic: Trends in Security's Response

To help security professionals benchmark and learn from one another, the ASIS Foundation has been tracking and sharing case studies illustrating security's response to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. For the past few months, we've followed nine organizations in different industries and countries around the globe and [posted regular updates here](#).

After six months, we have stepped back to look at the big picture. Following is an overview of general COVID-19 trends and takeaways, as well as trends by industry. Feel free to use and share this information with your colleagues. This research was funded by generous donations to the ASIS Foundation.

General

- Few offices have opened, as most keep pushing back their opening dates. This reflects a level of comfort with and productivity of staff working from home
- Cyber fraud and scams have exploded, many directly exploiting the pandemic
- Many experts fear that insider fraud and theft is occurring at high levels as companies focus on simply maintaining operations during COVID-19
- Many large companies are using thermal detection temperature screeners. But their high cost and doubts whether they will be needed long term have caused others to install interim solutions while they wait and see
- Temperature screeners tend to be used more as a feel-good measure than a robust method of keeping COVID-19 out of factories, distribution centers, and other facilities that remain operational
- Temperature checking raises GDPR issues in Europe, which vary by country
- Businesses are removing or propping open doors, and/or providing staff with an antimicrobial "key" to pull open doors, press elevator buttons, etc.
- Limits are being imposed on elevator occupancy and designated standing areas
- Business travel is almost completely shut down outside of Asia
- Initial scarcity of cleaning products and PPE has eased
- Security has been enlisted as a key strategic and operation component of COVID-19 response, in many cases leading to enhanced authority and prestige and expanded duties

Higher Education

- As colleges and universities reopen, some are virtual only, while others are hybrid in-person and virtual
- Barely a week or two into classes, outbreaks have occurred at University of North Carolina and University of Notre Dame, reinforcing how difficult it is to isolate a population of students

- Incidents of COVID-19 at universities around the country show a weakness in screening off-campus students who remained near the school over the summer and failed to self-quarantine
- Among common measures for prevention and response:
 - COVID-19 tests before matriculation, and periodic retests
 - Allowing professors to opt out of live classes
 - Requiring mask use when inside any space except one's own dorm room (and providing free masks with university logos)
 - Frequent sanitization of common spaces
 - Newly built outdoor classrooms (in warm-weather schools) and spaced seating in indoor classrooms
 - Installation of plexiglass barriers in classrooms and other facilities
 - More frequent cleaning of bathrooms
 - Replacement of air dryers with paper towel dispensers in classrooms
 - Restrictions on student gatherings
 - Suspension of sports programs
 - Abundant hand sanitizer stations
 - Rigorous contact tracing protocols
 - Dorms/housing set aside for students who test positive

Manufacturing plants

- Expanded social distancing
 - Standards differ depending on country, region, etc.
 - Unidirectional flow when possible
- Staggered shifts
- No penalties for sick days
- Face masks—plus face shields when workers must talk to one another
- Abundant hand sanitizer stations
- Temperature screening at entrances
- Frequent plant sanitization
- Inspection of air filters and reengineering of HVAC systems
- Rigorous contact tracing protocols
- Outbreaks in communities, where many people work at a single plant have shut down plants for weeks at a time

Banks and Financial Institutions

- Limited branch hours
- Face-to-face meetings replaced by virtual meetings
- Occupancy limits in branches
- Additional security guards to enforce social distancing
- Back offices have been under tremendous strain from applications to the U.S. Paycheck Protection Program, requests for new loans, and requests for renegotiated terms, extensions, etc.
- Social distancing signage

- Directional arrows
- Mandatory mask use
- Focus on empathy for customers as a key element of good business practice, corporate social responsibility, and corporate reputation

Retail

- Removal of large displays to create social distancing space
- One-way aisles or specific directional routes
- Plastic barriers at cashier stations
- No touch payment systems
- Greeter at door handing out masks and regulating entry for compliance with occupancy limits
- Masks are amounting to a large, unexpected expense for retailers
- Mask policies are also causing friction with customers who oppose masks:
 - Creating tense or violent situations with staff who must enforce those policies
 - Some stores have increased use of security personnel to enforce mask policies
 - Other retailers have decided not to enforce mask policies for staff safety
- Increase in shoplifting at some retail stores
 - Thieves emboldened by lack of police presence
 - Police policies shifted during COVID-19 so as not to crowd jails with nonviolent offenders
 - Reluctance of store security to physically encounter someone who might be sick
 - Captured shoplifters have claimed to have COVID-19, coughed or spit at security/police
- Massive increase in online operations; some store branches converted to online fulfillment centers
- Issues with returned or handled goods, leading to:
 - All-sales-final policy in brick-and-mortar stores
 - Sanitization protocols such as sprays for hard objects and steamers for fabrics
 - “Quarantining” returned or handled items for at least 24 hours before putting them back on sale
- Shuttered fitting rooms
- Use of software that allows customers to virtually “try on” clothes
- Constant store cleaning

NGOs, Nonprofits, and Houses of Worship

- Shutdown having keen effects on areas where NGOs operate (e.g. parts of Africa, Central America)
- NGO face to face assistance shut down; remote virtual assistance limited due to low bandwidth or limited Internet infrastructure in-country
- NGOs grappling with local populace who think COVID-19 is a hoax
- Cultural differences among regions re use of masks, temperature screening, social distancing, etc.
- NGO travel almost completely shut down

- NGOs trying to do the right thing: social responsibility is crucial (how will we be viewed when the crisis is over?)
- Nonprofits that rely on in-person events for income are hurting; most insurance policies not covering canceled events due to COVID-19
- Nonprofits switching to remote delivery models
- Nonprofits finding intense competition in the remote delivery space (e.g. an abundance of free webinars, white papers, resources, etc.)
- Three-quarters of nonprofits have had to dip into reserves
- Many houses of worship shut down or have reopened with services for small, socially distanced groups (small weddings, confirmations, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, etc.)
- HOWs using greeters at door to welcome, take temperature, explain rules
- HOWs are broadcasting services online
- HOWs contending with congregants who are upset that their prayer routines have been disrupted
- Where possible, HOWs moving events/services outside to parking lots, grassy areas, beaches, etc.
- In communities where most congregants are elderly, HOWs are struggling with how to discourage the old or immunocompromised to attend services, while not denying them the opportunity for spiritual enrichment
- HOWs using signage to reinforce hygiene, social distancing, mask use, and the risk of being in close quarters for extended periods
- Shared collection plates becoming stationary collection boxes

About the Author

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