

Community Bank Best Practices for Addressing COVID-19

The following tips have been shared by community banks in Texas and around the country.

In addition, please also consider any guidance provided by state and federal regulators and by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

FOR BANK CUSTOMERS

- Clean the bank thoroughly, especially high touch areas. Provide bank employees with sanitizer, gloves, wipes, etc.
- Watch out for cyber social engineering schemes: Remind customers of scams, especially emails — latest include “CDC” requiring purchases of all kind to be made online and asking for credit card info; asking for SSN and bank account number to deposit “lost wage” reimbursement.
- Establish one branch lobby for business customers only.
- Banks are making different decisions about closing lobbies and going to drive-thru/ITM/ATM only. Closing lobbies is not the same as closing branches. Some banks are establishing “triggers” for closing lobbies, such as Category 5 Pandemic/closing of bars and restaurants/staffing reduction. Remember to designate “Business” and “Consumer” Lanes.
- Communicate carefully with customers about using the best method of banking for them. Remind them of telebanking/online banking/ITM/ATM. You DO NOT want to instill panic. Communicate by all means possible — text, email, website, social media. Put a posting on the lobby door about any changes — appointments/drive thru only, to not come in the bank if you are feeling ill, etc.
- Designate times for “at risk” customers (because of age or condition) to visit the lobby when no others are allowed. Some are calling these “Golden Hours.”
- Remove all beverage/snack stations from lobbies.
- Some banks have reviewed the capability of allowing child care for employees in the bank, but decided that the liability was too great.
- Identify “hospitality” sector customers and reach out to identify assistance that might be needed.
- Open loans/new accounts by appointment only.
- Use branches or REO as collection points for groceries or meals for kids and elderly. Allow staff to volunteer to help others.

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FOR BANK EMPLOYEES

- Clean the bank thoroughly, especially high touch areas. Provide bank employees with sanitizer, gloves, wipes etc.
- Banks should look out for Business Email Compromise attempts. Be sure that any major wire transfers and transactions that are requested by email are validated by phone, not just on email.
- Regulators have agreed to stand by accommodations that banks take to help customers, so long as they are prudent and reasonable. Do not throw good money after bad — i.e., a customer who is defaulting because of bad business decisions rather than Coronavirus.
- If employees are sick, they should stay home and call their doctor.
- FDIC is concerned that there might be a run on cash. They suggest you request the same amount of cash as you would for a holiday weekend. Track large cash withdrawals and contact those customers to explain that the bank is secure.
- Communicate regularly with your regulators. Have your Pandemic Response Team meet regularly to keep up with changes.
- ALL FDIC employees are working from home. If you have a question, make sure that you leave a voice mail and follow it up with an email.
- Split teams up between buildings, if possible, so your entire mortgage processing department etc., is not exposed at one time.
- Some banks are paying for time off for one or more of the following: illness, necessary child or family care or “high risk” situation. Others are waiting to see what Congress will pass or requiring employees to use sick/personal days.
- Look at the possibility of consolidating office functions that serve overlapping areas.
- Suspend all non-essential business travel.
- Hold all group meetings via teleconferencing, “Go-to-Meeting,” etc.
- Advise employees to review personal travel carefully. If employees go to an area that is considered a hot spot, they may be asked to self-quarantine for 14 days.
- Ask as many people to work from home as you can. Use social distancing and or offices to help separate essential employees working at the bank. Some banks are alternating days for work from home between an “A and B” team.
- Open loans/new accounts by appointment only.
- Prepare your bank to operate in a completely virtual world.
- Advise younger employees about the risk to older/high risk condition people. Explain why social distancing is so important.