

# **Policy recommendations for societies resilient to sanitary risks**

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## **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic caused unforeseen loss of life and economic damage. Virtually all economic sectors and public services were significantly restricted, and many remain inactive. The damage to society in terms of deaths, disruption to health systems, psychological impact, learning difficulties, economic slow-down, and bankruptcies, will be immeasurable and long lasting.

The pandemic accelerated a shift in the way businesses and the public sector operate. Remote working and education became the norm throughout 2020, as we could not initially control health and safety risks in the workplace and other places open to the public.

The Testing, Inspection and Certification (TIC) sector supported the transition to the socially distant functioning of the economy and society by offering new services, updating technical expertise, adjusting to remote inspections, and ensuring safe onsite inspections when necessary.

As economies are now trying to relaunch, it is important to ensure a safe transition with clear and easily implementable sanitary rules. In parallel, it is time to design preventive and cost-effective measures for protection against sanitary risks caused by contagious diseases in the future to avoid a similar situation whereby millions of lives are lost, and economies come to a halt.

To prepare for the new normal, governments should develop regulatory frameworks to improve societies' resilience against intense sanitary incidents and minimise their adverse effects. It is important to make the best possible use of the lessons learnt from the current crisis to prepare an effective policy toolbox for preventing and mitigating future crises.

To this end, TIC Council recommends the following policy measures:

1. Cover any regulatory or legislative gaps to address sanitary risks following a risk-based approach.
2. Promote the development of protocols and trainings, so that organizations have clear implementing instructions for the requirements according to their specific needs.
3. Integrate third-party sanitary inspections to regulatory requirements to help ensure proper implementation by organizations and their staff.
4. Improve regulatory certainty for organizations implementing sanitary protocols, by setting clear conditions for relaunching activities after a crisis or remain operational.
5. Ensure continuous monitoring through preemptive testing to ensure operational continuity and faster responses to outbreaks.
6. Continue rigorous PPE testing.

## Contribution of the TIC sector to preventing and addressing sanitary risks

Third-party TIC organizations are specifically accredited for conducting inspections against all types of risks, including sanitary ones. This ensures their competency, independence, and trustworthiness. Regulatory agencies and organizations can have confidence that third-party inspections will be performed by qualified and trained professionals.

Therefore, the TIC sector provides support in the reopening of the economy and increases confidence following the current crisis. Looking forward, the TIC sector can assist organizations in improving their resilience for coping with future sanitary risks, mitigating the effects of diseases or other natural disasters, while supporting economic continuity.

The TIC Council members reiterate their willingness to offer their expertise and cooperate with authorities to develop and implement appropriate guidelines for economic reopening and continuity while supporting health and safety, as well as to participate in relevant standardisation activities worldwide.

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[TIC Council](#) is a global association representing over 90 international independent third-party testing, inspection, certification, and verification organizations. Testing, Inspection and Certification (TIC) companies cater to a diverse range of industry sectors and a variety of standards and legislation. The industry represents an estimated one million employees across the world with annual sales of approximately USD 200 billion.

## TIC Council's recommendations in detail

### 1. Develop risk-based requirements

We recommend that policymakers cover any regulatory or legislative gaps to address sanitary risks. These may include operational guidelines, protocols, minimum requirements, inspection and due diligence aspects for businesses and public services to reopen, as well as to operate in the future.

The minimum requirements should:

- Adopt a risk-based approach to ensure business continuity in times of crisis, such as the current one, ensuring safety for employees and the public.
- Specify for a given activity the guidelines of the relevant health authorities, as well as the relevant guidelines of the [World Health Organization](#).
- Make use of preferably existing standards or develop new - consensus-based ones - in case of gaps. Thereby, technical experts from all sectors will have the opportunity to cooperate in their development.

Minimum requirements and guidelines based on standards have several benefits, including:

- Promoting unambiguous definitions and clear obligations for all economic operators.
- Reducing the costs for developing relevant implementation measures, such as internal procedures and training.
- Enabling policymakers to set clear enforcement rules and penalties.
- Verifying the robust implementation of the measures through periodic audits and market surveillance activities.
- Giving assurance to citizens and companies to safely resume all activities that will trigger economic activity.
- Enabling companies and public services to abide by the same safety and hygiene requirements regardless of location according to their sector.
- Restoring trust and giving assurance to citizens to travel safely around the world.

### 2. Develop tailored sanitary protocols and trainings

Implementing requirements and guidelines requires different measures for each sector and company. The benefits of implementing such protocols go beyond building trust within an organisation.

For example, they contribute to developing rapid responses to hazards by enhancing preparedness for responding to future threats. Thereby, alleviating potential negative impacts on a company's activities.

Therefore, we recommend that regulatory requirements promote the development of protocols that address the specific needs of both public and private sector organisations. These requirements should take into account their size, activities, sector, and level of interaction with the general public.

Moreover, training is necessary to raise awareness amongst employees of organisations at all levels. Training can refer to everyday operational aspects, methods for mitigating risks and governance principles to avoid outbreaks.

Training should also cover practices that anticipate the future formats of working, including remote working. For example, training employees in preventive measures when they return to the office after a period of working remotely or when using shared equipment.

Overall, we recommend that future policies promoting protocols and trainings would benefit from the/make use of our sector, which has the necessary expertise to support companies in developing and implementing such protocols for their specific needs.

### **3. Integrate sanitary inspections in health and safety requirements**

We recommend that the minimum operational requirements against sanitary risks require inspections by third-party TIC providers. Otherwise, a potential lack of uniform implementation could hinder efforts to achieve regulatory objectives.

Third-party TIC organizations are specifically accredited for these activities, ensuring their competency, independence, and trustworthiness. Regulatory agencies and organizations can have confidence that third-party inspections will be performed by qualified and trained professionals.

We suggest that these inspections should ideally be developed according to commonly agreed requirements to ensure their effectiveness. Furthermore, these inspections may be coordinated with periodic inspections already conducted for purposes related to occupational health and safety and other purposes addressing risks in a comprehensive way, including sanitary risks from contagious diseases.

The scope of inspections may include:

- control of cleaning and disinfection equipment and procedures
- aeration and ventilation equipment and procedures
- social distancing measures for employees and the public
- special verification for restaurants, including those in the workplace
- procedures for the provision, cleaning and use of personal protective equipment
- sanitary risk management within the supply chain
- verification of a crisis and alert management system
- personal contacts tracking
- existence of an internal compliance system

As mentioned above, inspections are necessary to ensure the proper implementation of sanitary measures. Furthermore, they contribute to:

- Protecting employees, clients, and the public from contagious diseases during their interactions with a given organization.
- Simplifying the control and risk mitigation systems used by organizations.
- Providing citizens with verified information on implementation of the relevant sanitary protocols.
- Improving technology, expertise and standardization on sanitary measures that will protect against contagious diseases.
- More efficient controls by enforcement authorities, as they can rely on the use of third-party inspections and verify proper implementation through certification and other documentation.
- Providing evidence of the organization's commitment to protect its employees and the public, as well as to mitigate sanitary risks from contagious diseases for the society in which they operate.

Finally, third-party inspections improve the awareness and understanding of organizations in designing and implementing preventive sanitary protocols.

#### **4. Improve regulatory certainty for organisations implementing sanitary protocols**

We recommend that businesses and organisations implementing the agreed sanitary protocols and inspections will receive regulatory clarity defining the conditions upon which they could rely to relaunch activities after a crisis or remain operational.

Thereby, companies and organisations will have a strong incentive to implement such protocols and inspections on a permanent basis. As such, infection risks will be reduced, potentially decreasing outbreaks.

The TIC sector can support the implementation of such an approach through activities to verify the proper implementation of such protocols.

#### **5. Continuous monitoring through preemptive testing to ensure operational continuity**

We recommend that policymakers develop measures for the continuous monitoring of key indicators through preemptive testing to minimize the effects of future outbreaks.

Throughout this pandemic, outbreaks were regularly identified after one or more individuals displayed symptoms and were subsequently tested positive for the virus. Since symptoms started showing on average 5 to 10 days after infection, these individuals could unknowingly propagate the virus to their peers and colleagues.

A direct consequence of this prolonged exposure was a large reduction in capacity of public services and private sector organizations. Industry and public services had to shut down because most regional regulations stipulate a mandatory quarantine period and clinical testing for anyone in contact with infected individuals.

The impact on an organizations' ability to continue their activities can be significantly reduced by regularly testing their operating environment. The sooner infected individuals are identified, the sooner protocols can be triggered to limit the impact on an organization and its environment.

Therefore, it is important to make use of continuous monitoring solutions that can identify asymptomatic individuals and, in some cases, detect positive cases almost as soon as individuals are infected. These includes preemptive testing, acting as an early-warning system accompanied by proactive containment protocols. For example:

- Wastewater testing: identifies positive cases in the first days of infection by continuously monitoring and testing a population's wastewater outlets.
- Worn mask testing: identifies positive cases by testing the masks worn by individuals during their work hours.
- Surface testing: identifies whether at least one infected individual was in contact with key surfaces such as door handles, elevator button, coffee machines, and more.
- Indoor air testing: identifies whether at least one infected individual was in a controlled environment.

These complimentary monitoring and testing solutions:

- Improve the effectiveness of sanitary protocols.
- Create a more comprehensive and robust risk management strategy of their environment so organizations can return to normal operations more swiftly.
- Support human testing where it is most needed thereby reducing associated costs.
- Allow earlier detection of infections, as well as possible variants/new infections in the future, ensuring risk mitigation measures and actions to address these situations are put in place much faster and more effectively, in a targeted manner.

Therefore, we recommend that policymakers implement continuous monitoring solutions to proactively ensure health and safety of employees and operational continuity of critical services.

## **6. Continue rigorous Personal Protective Equipment testing**

During the pandemic, many industries sought TIC sector support in conducting conformity assessment of personal protective equipment (PPE). For instance, TIC companies:

- Supported companies as they repurposed their manufacturing sites to address the growing demand for PPEs.
- Conducted conformity assessment for innovative products that helped address the risks of the pandemic, including medical devices.

Moreover, as has been widely reported, there were multiple confirmed cases of non-compliant and counterfeit PPE and cleaning materials circulating on the market, (potentially) resulting in a risk to users' lives.

The TIC sector quickly responded by adjusting conformity assessment services and activities to the conditions of the pandemic. This included the development of remote and hybrid testing and inspections that contributed to the continued availability of protective equipment and medical devices needed for the protection of health and safety.

Moving forward, as demand for protection from sanitary risks increases and innovative products are launched, it is important to ensure that they meet health and safety requirements before reaching consumers.

TIC services can contribute to this goal, by testing product compliance before products are placed on the market, verify claims, and provide labelling relevant to sanitary risks.

Third-party conformity assessment is more efficient and effective than market surveillance activities, a post-market activity, in verifying compliance and reducing the risk to consumers and businesses. This leverages the limited resources of market surveillance authorities and allows them to focus their resources on complex potential risks.

Therefore, we recommend that policymakers implement the requirements for mandatory third-party testing for all products relevant to sanitary risks.