

# When Will Business Return to Normal in the Furniture Industry?

*With coronavirus vaccines being rolled out in the US, Formaspace CEO Jeff Turk talks about the expectations for businesses next year.*

AUSTIN, TEXAS, UNITED STATES, January 6, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The recent approval by US health authorities of two new Covid 19 vaccines that have proven highly effective during clinical trials offers hope that we could return to some sense of normality during 2021.



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White House officials said they expect that 20 million Americans will be vaccinated by the end of December 2020, and it is hoped that by the middle of 2021, the majority of Americans will be vaccinated, bringing us closer to the 70 – 90% figure that public health officials believe would bring widespread herd immunity against the virus.

Meanwhile, Bloomberg is tracking the daily progress of vaccination efforts around the world, and, at the time of writing, they report that 2.13 million Americans have already received an initial vaccine dose, well short of the

White House’s estimates, but still a positive development.

The CDC recently issued vaccine program guidelines that identify which cohorts should receive priority for vaccination, although, at this time, the federal government is letting states set the final priorities. (Texas, for example, has moved those with comorbidities into the second tier.) When could you receive the vaccine? The New York Times has created a useful interactive online

tool to help individuals estimate when they might receive the vaccine.

Many challenges remain for a safe and effective vaccination program, starting with logistics companies, such as FedEx and UPS, which must maintain these two new vaccines at exceptionally cold temperatures, particularly the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine, which must be stored at -70 C.

While that may seem impossible, it's only a little bit colder than existing "cold chain" logistics operations that ship food-grade raw tuna to Japan, where shipments are kept at -60 C to avoid discoloring the fish. Refrigeration specialists, such as Thermo King, have adapted their freezer designs, originally built for transporting tuna, to accommodate shipping the new vaccines to the US by air from the main manufacturing plant in Belgium. Other innovations include IoT sensors added inside each transport container, which monitor temperatures and sound and alarm if something goes wrong.

The second challenge that has concerned public health officials throughout the pandemic is whether the virus will mutate, and thus, render the vaccines less effective. Over the weekend before Christmas, the UK government reported the discovery of such a "variant" mutation that is spreading rapidly in southeast England; this new variant is significantly more contagious (potentially raising the absolute  $R_0$  transmissibility rate by as much as 0.9), causing France and other European countries to temporarily sever transportation links with Great Britain.

Will the new vaccines be able to protect us against this new variant or others that many yet emerge? BioNTech founder Uğur Şahin expressed confidence that the existing Pfizer BioNTech vaccine will remain effective against the new variant, but they will need two weeks to verify this.



Jeff Turk, Formaspace CEO



Formaspace workbenches installed in the new GM ventilator production facility in Kokomo, Michigan.

In a worst-case scenario, he stated that it would take the company six weeks to develop a revised vaccine (if required); however, the updated vaccine would still need to undergo new human trials and be approved by regulators. Şahin also expressed concern that the new variant's higher transmissibility rate might mean that a correspondingly higher number of people will need to be vaccinated to achieve widespread herd immunity. Hopefully, after all the tragedies and disappointments of 2020, we won't have to face yet another setback, but only time will tell.



#### Discussion With Jeff Turk, Formaspace CEO

Despite these ongoing challenges, the widespread availability of these new vaccines is some of the best news we've had in what's been a difficult year.

To get some more perspective on what took place in the furniture industry in 2020 and what we might expect in 2021, we spoke with Jeff Turk, Formaspace CEO.

Q: What Were The High And Low Points For Formaspace In 2020?

Thanks for speaking with me today.

At Formaspace, we began preparing for COVID-19 as early as January. On March 21st, a unit of General Motors contacted us to see if we could build multiple truckloads of workbenches to set up a new ventilator production line at a converted Delco factory in Kokomo, Michigan in eleven days. As you may recall, during the early stages of the pandemic, many ICU patients with Covid-19 needed ventilators to stay alive, and they were in short supply at the time. We leaped into action and started two shifts to build 500 workbenches, with the first truckload departing for the GM factory only three days after the first phone call from GM. That really got the company's adrenaline pumping, and I'm proud we were able to respond so quickly.

After completing the GM order, we created our first Covid response line of products.

These include safety-oriented accessories, such as transparent dividers and workbench-mounted barriers to help protect workers on the job, especially those at high-risk positions, such as customer-facing bank tellers or other employees who needed to work together in close

quarters.

I also recall being optimistic during the spring that things seemed to be going in the right direction in regards to the virus, and we would be able to get the pandemic under control. Unfortunately, several regions of the country reopened before getting the virus fully under control. We had a summer surge of infections, which hit Texas and other southern states particularly hard.

Our business mix changed in the second half of 2020 with many of our office customers delaying delivery of orders; however, we are very fortunate that our Formaspace customer base is very diversified. When orders for custom furniture in the office, hospitality, and casual outdoor furniture markets began tapering, we began to see a corresponding rise in orders for the [pharma manufacturing and laboratory furniture](#) market, where we have a strong presence as manufacturers of custom laboratory installations and modular workbenches.

And as we close out the year 2020, the laboratory business continues to be strong for Formaspace, as health science companies continue to ramp up new facilities in response to the pandemic.

Q: What Gives You Hope For A Better 2021 And Hopefully, A Return To “Normal?”

Like many people, I’m placing a lot of hope in the efficacy of these new vaccines.

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