

# COVID-19 Protocols for Workplaces

## Introduction

“COVID-19 Protocols for Workplaces” is developed to provide guidance to all workplaces, and especially those not currently covered by an existing COVID-19 protocol, in reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in the workplace. It provides direction on assessing the hazard presented by the COVID-19 virus in the general workplace environment and describes both required and recommended controls to address that hazard. It is to be used as a basis for a “Workplace COVID-19 Prevention Plan” specific to your workplace.

Many of the specific requirements in this guidance document depend on the COVID-19 [Public Health Order](#). As the requirements of the Order do change from time to time, your “Workplace COVID-19 Prevention Plan” should be reviewed whenever there is an update to the Order to ensure it still meets all the requirements.

## Assess the Hazards

Hazard assessment means taking a careful look at the workplace to determine what harms exist for workers, above and beyond the usual hazards of the workplace, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first being the risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus itself, with and without symptoms being present.

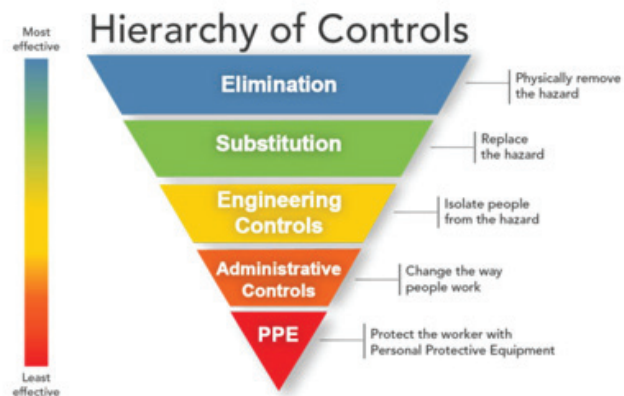
COVID-19 is spread by the respiratory droplets an infected person produces when they breathe, cough, sneeze, talk, shout or sing. Physical contact with an infected person or contaminated surface may also increase the risk of infection. The virus enters the body through the throat, nose and eyes. The risk of transmission increases with close human interactions that include:

1. Close-contact settings (standing or sitting within 2 metres; increased duration of close contact increases risk)
2. Closed spaces with poor ventilation
3. Crowded work environments with many people nearby

The workplace should be reviewed to identify the potential exposure risks based on the above routes of transmission. In particular, review the many ways that people may interact, such as, one-on-one in small groups, informal and formal meetings and, interactions with clients or customers, staff-to-staff interactions and managers-to-staff interactions. The assessment should also consider any additional hazards introduced or increased due to potential staff shortages, either because of sickness or controls (see below).

## Implement Controls

Once the hazard assessment is complete, the next step is to implement controls to address the risks of exposure identified in the hazard assessment. These should be implemented based on the hierarchy of controls. Whenever possible, the most effective or highest level of control should be used to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19. Most likely, you will use a combination of control strategies to address the risk.



The minimum **MANDATORY** controls which must be implemented to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in the workplace are:

- **Physical distancing** of at least 2 metres / 6 feet must be maintained as much as possible.
- **Non-medical masks** must be worn in public areas as defined in the [Public Health Order](#). They are also required in private indoor workplaces where there are interactions with the public; areas with poor ventilation; or areas where physical distancing cannot be maintained. Ensure [your mask meets the criteria](#) set out for a non-medical mask.
- **Gathering Limits**, as given in the [Public Health Order](#), must be followed in meeting rooms, common areas, or any other location people may gather. Regardless of the current gathering limit, ensure **physical distancing** can be maintained.

Other control measures to consider can include:

## Elimination

Working remotely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When possible, allow employees to work from home.</li> <li>• Limit tasks needing to be done on site.</li> </ul>
Employee self-assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees should not come to work if experiencing any <a href="#">COVID symptoms</a>.</li> <li>• Daily employee self-assessments using the <a href="#">daily screening tool</a> are recommended for all workplaces, <b>ESPECIALLY</b> for those in high-risk work environments. These include:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Where there is interaction with the public;</li> <li>- Workplaces where employees work close to one another and cannot physically distance due to the nature of the work or work environment; or</li> <li>- Critical infrastructure and services.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• If symptomatic, book a test using the <a href="#">COVID-19 self-assessment tool</a>.</li> <li>• Follow any <a href="#">requirements for self isolation</a> as a result of travel, testing, or as otherwise advised by Public Health.</li> <li>• Employees who cannot work from home may be eligible for up-to four days paid sick leave, and eligible employers may be reimbursed through <a href="#">Nova Scotia's Paid Sick Leave Program</a>.</li> </ul>

<p>Gathering Limits</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current <a href="#">Public Health Order</a> for gathering <b>limits</b> <b>MUST</b> be followed when planning meetings or other potential group activities in the workplace.</li> <li>• Gather in-person at the worksite <b>ONLY</b> when required for safety and/or essential operation of the business, and if it is not practical to meet virtually.</li> <li>• <b>NO</b> in-person social gatherings at the workplace.</li> <li>• Meet virtually instead of in-person.</li> <li>• Limit non-essential workplace visits by all parties.</li> </ul>
<p>Avoid Shared Spaces</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid gathering in-person and indoors as much as possible; sharing spaces increases the risk of transmission through the air.</li> <li>• Some considerations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Restrict access to unnecessary areas such as unused meeting rooms;</li> <li>- Encourage staff not to gather indoors for lunches and breaks;</li> <li>- In general, if an employee does not need to be in a particular area to perform their job, they should not be there.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Substitution

Hazard substitution is a hazard control strategy in which a material or process is replaced with another that is less hazardous. Given that is not possible with the COVID-19 virus, substitution is not an applicable control measure.

## Engineering controls

Physical Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When 2 metres / 6 feet distancing cannot be maintained, physical barriers may be an appropriate alternative.</li> <li>• Barriers must be constructed with a hard material that does not allow liquid to penetrate or air to pass through (i.e. non-porous) and that is easily cleanable and allows for proper disinfection.</li> <li>• Partitions need to be large and high enough to extend well beyond the breathing zone of users (minimum of 2 feet above a standing position). The breathing zone is the immediate air space in which a person breathes and can be visualized as a bubble with a radius of 30 cm (12 inches) around the nose and mouth.</li> <li>• Barriers must be set up in a manner that does not create a hazard. For example, do not block exits or emergency travel paths. Do not block or interfere with air supply vents, sprinkler systems or other life safety systems.</li> </ul>
Ventilation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For mechanically ventilated workplaces:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Have the HVAC system inspected/evaluated to ensure it is properly maintained and operating as designed.</li> <li>- Reduce air recirculation and increase the outdoor air intake as much as possible while maintaining comfortable indoor temperature and humidity.</li> <li>- Do not turn off the ventilation system while the building is occupied. Outside working hours, turn the system down and not off completely.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• For workplaces without mechanical ventilation:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If possible, open windows and doors to promote air circulation.</li> <li>- Consider high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filtered cleaning devices.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• For more information on ventilation see <a href="#">COVID-19: Guidance on indoor ventilation during the pandemic</a></li> <li>• If portable fans are used, ensure they do not blow air directly from one person's breathing zone to other occupants of a room.</li> </ul>

## Administrative controls

<p>Employer Sick Policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a clear policy outlining expectations for employees to not come to work, or leave work as soon as possible, if feeling unwell.</li> <li>• Establish a clear policy outlining expectations for managers or supervisors to send symptomatic employees home.</li> <li>• Establish a clear policy for return to work for an employee who tests positive for COVID-19. Public Health does not recommend or require employees to have a negative test before returning to work once they have recovered, are no longer symptomatic and have finished their mandatory isolation.</li> </ul>
<p>Distancing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical distancing of at least 2 metres / 6 feet <b>MUST</b> be maintained as much as possible.</li> <li>• Restrict elevator capacity to the maximum number of riders that allows 2 metres /6 feet distancing.</li> <li>• Physical changes that may be needed to ensure adequate physical distancing:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Remove or reconfigure chairs, furniture, and workstations so 2 metres / 6 feet distance can be maintained.</li> <li>- Remove or otherwise take out of service chairs in waiting areas, meeting rooms, lunchrooms so 2 metres / 6 feet distance can be maintained.</li> <li>- Post maximum occupancy for each room</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Stagger lunch and break times to reduce the number of employees gathering. Limit capacities to ensure that at least 6 feet physical distancing can happen between individuals</li> </ul>

Masks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Non-medical masks</b> must be worn in <b>public areas</b> as defined in the <a href="#">Public Health Order</a>.</li> <li>• <b>Non-medical masks</b> must be worn in <b>private indoor workplaces</b> where: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- there are interactions with the public;</li> <li>- areas with poor ventilation;</li> <li>- areas where physical distancing cannot be maintained such as corridors, lobbies, washrooms, lunch/break rooms, meeting rooms; and</li> <li>- any place frequent interaction with others may occur.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Post mandatory <a href="#">facemask signage</a> at entrances, in common areas, and other frequented locations.</li> </ul>
Signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reminders to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wear non-medical mask.</li> <li>- Not enter a workplace if symptomatic.</li> <li>- Limit close contact interactions with co-workers.</li> <li>- Practice good hand and respiratory hygiene.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Clearly label occupancy limits for rooms; if rooms are closed or access restricted, post signage to indicate they are not to be used.</li> <li>• Examples of signage available on the <a href="#">Nova Scotia Coronavirus (COVID-19)</a> website.</li> </ul>
Control movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct traffic flow with the use of signage, floor decals, temporary barriers or other means. Ensure emergency exits are not blocked.</li> <li>• Establish separate entrances and exits, particularly in busy areas.</li> <li>• If possible, stagger employee start and end times to minimize the number of people arriving and leaving at the same time.</li> <li>• Whenever possible, minimize cross contact between separate shifts, work groups and other employee cohorts to minimize the number of contacts each individual employee has at the workplace.</li> </ul>

<p>Cleaning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase frequency of cleaning and disinfection, particularly with high traffic areas, high contact surfaces and washrooms.</li> <li>• Provide disposable cleaning wipes or other alternatives to allow employees to clean commonly used surfaces themselves.</li> <li>• Use cleaning products from <a href="#">Health Canada’s list of hard-surface disinfectants</a> shown to work against COVID-19.</li> <li>• Keep hand sanitizer dispensers readily available and in plain view with signs indicating to use upon entry.</li> </ul>
<p>Contact Tracing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a daily sign in sheet (legible) or similar tracking method for employees and visitors to allow contact tracing in the event of an exposure.</li> <li>• Include name, contact information, and time/duration on site.</li> <li>• For diverse worksites, have separate sign in sheets for different areas. For example, one for the office, one for the shop floor, and one for shared spaces such as lunchrooms.</li> <li>• Develop an emergency evening and weekend call-out list. Assign organizational leads who can produce the above information for Public Health when requested.</li> </ul>
<p>Personal hygiene and respiratory etiquette</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop the spread of germs that can make you and others sick: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Educate workers on personal hygiene and respiratory etiquette best practices.</li> <li>- Wash or sanitize hands often using soap and water (best approach) or alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.</li> <li>- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue OR into your elbow when you cough or sneeze. Note that a new or persistent cough is a symptom of COVID-19, which would require the employee to leave work as soon as possible</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Personal Protective Equipment such as face shields, gloves and respirators would not typically be an applicable control measure in an office environment. Note that a non-medical mask is not considered PPE, as it is intended primarily to protect others, not yourself.

### Personal Protective Equipment

Face Shields & Goggles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Face shields or goggles can be used in the workplace in combination with face masks to provide added protection, particularly in situations where social distancing of 2 metres / 6 feet cannot be maintained.</li><li>• Face shields or goggles cannot be used to replace face masks or other protective measures.</li></ul>
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## Communicate

Once the “Workplace COVID-19 Prevention Plan” has been completed, it must be communicated to all affected employees. They must be informed of the steps being taken to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 exposure in the workplace, as well as any specific steps they must take as part of the plan.

If employees are concerned about hazards in their workplace then they should report to their supervisor. If the matter is not remedied to their satisfaction, they must report it to your Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee (JOHSC) / representative. If it is still not remedied to their satisfaction they can contact the OH&S Division of Nova Scotia Labour and Advanced Education ([LAESafetybranch@novascotia.ca](mailto:LAESafetybranch@novascotia.ca)), who will investigate the work refusal. More information can be found on the [NSLAE website](#).

In the event of a positive case or close contacts at the workplace it is imperative to follow the direction from Public Health. It comes down to the specifics of the individual case and how far back Public Health feels the person may have been contagious. Following Public Health advice during these situations is the best approach—they will be in touch.

## Evaluate

The plan should also be re-evaluated on a regular basis to ensure it is still adequately addressing the risk of COVID-19 exposure in the workplace. It should also be revisited any time there are changes to the COVID-19 [Public Health Order](#) to ensure it still meets the requirements detailed in the Order.

## Business Continuity

A thorough and well implemented “Workplace COVID-19 Prevention Plan” will hopefully prevent spread of the virus in the workplace. However, organizations should have emergency response plans in place to immediately address COVID-19 in their workplace. Developing a business continuity plan helps an organization prioritize recovery of each business process and define what those processes need by addressing the following:

- What are the significant business processes in the organization?
- What are the minimum personnel requirements needed to conduct the business process?
- What resources, including human resources, are required for business processes to function normally?
- What services, equipment, applications, or systems are considered critical?
- What are the main financial and operational impacts if these business processes cannot operate?
- What IT and non-IT resources are required and considered critical to execute that business process?
- How long can things function without doing these business processes before it significantly affects the organization? (i.e. what is the recovery time)
- How quickly can these processes be resumed should a downtime event occur?
- Are there key dependencies to consider? For example, are there other systems connected to these business processes that should be considered critical?

## Questions

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## References

[American Industrial Hygiene Association \[AIHA\] – Reopening Guidance for General Office Settings](#)

[Government of Alberta – COVID-19 Information Guidance for Office Buildings](#)

[Worksafe BC – COVID-19 Safety Plan Template](#)