

# Occupational Health and Safety COVID-19 Guidelines: Work-isolation

February 3, 2022

## What is Work Isolation?

Work isolation allows fully-vaccinated, non-symptomatic close contacts of a COVID-19 positive case to continue working outside their home. As per section 3.1 of the [Public Health Order](#), requirements for close contacts have been modified to allow close contacts to continue working as long as they remain non-symptomatic or have not tested positive for COVID-19 unless otherwise directed to self-isolate by Public Health. This document provides guidance to employers and employees on measures to take in the workplace to allow close contacts to safely return to work.

This guidance is for all workplaces except high-risk healthcare settings, such as hospitals, home care and long-term care facilities. Employees in these settings must continue to notify their employer and follow their occupational health guidance and their own health care specific work isolation protocols.

**Employers are encouraged to develop a plan to allow employees who are close contacts of confirmed cases of COVID-19 to work safely.**

## Who CAN Participate in Work Isolation?

Work isolation is allowed for any employee who is a **close contact of a known COVID-19** case or been at an [exposure site](#), and is **NOT symptomatic**. In addition:

- Employee must be fully vaccinated
- Employee has not tested positive for COVID-19 and is symptom free.
- Employee is a household contact but **can fully isolate** from the individual(s) in the home who have tested positive for COVID-19.

## Who CANNOT Participate in Work Isolation?

- Employees who are **symptomatic or test positive with either a PCR or a Point of Care Test (POCT)**

- Employees who are **NOT** fully vaccinated. <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/vaccine/>
- Employees who are household contacts of an individual with COVID-19 who is **unable to fully isolate from the rest of the household**.
- Employees who are **moderately to severely immunocompromised** and have not had a third COVID-19 vaccine dose.
- Employees who can work from home during isolation are encouraged to do so.

## What are the Expectations for an Employee Under Work Isolation?

Employees who are vaccinated, non-symptomatic close contacts must stay at home, with the exception of going to work, until they have had negative test results(s) within the appropriate time frame. For PCR testing, one negative test at least 3 days (72 hours) after the last exposure is required. For POCT (rapid tests), two negative results are required; one at least 72 hours after exposure and a second completed 48 hours later. In both cases, it is also necessary to be feeling well, fever has resolved and other symptoms are improving.

Full details of testing requirements are found on the [Nova Scotia Health website](#).

- Where possible, employee should be encouraged /permitted to work from home rather than report to work in person.
- If the job requires presence in the workplace, the employee is to follow the requirements of the employer Work Isolation Plan if one has been adopted.
- In the absence of a Work Isolation Plan, then, at minimum, the employee must:
  - o Wear a properly-fitted 3-layer mask or medical mask at all times.
  - o Eat/drink alone.
  - o Physically distance from others when possible.
- If you develop symptoms – return home immediately and [self isolate](#).

## What is a Work Isolation Plan?

A Work Isolation Plan is recommended for all employers with work isolating employees in the workplace. Similar to a Covid Prevention Plan, the written work isolation plan must detail the specific control measures implemented to minimize contact between the worker participating in

work isolation, other workers, and the public in order to minimize potential COVID-19 exposures. The plan must be appropriate for the workplace and work performed, and should address the following requirements:

### 1. Active Screening for COVID-19 Symptoms

Employees participating in work isolation must perform active screening for COVID-19 symptoms. Screening must be done regularly throughout the workday; at least twice daily, including prior to reporting for work. The Daily Checklist is a useful screening tool: <https://novascotia.ca/CoronaVirus/docs/Daily-COVID-checklist-en.pdf>. An employee **CANNOT REPORT TO WORK** should they demonstrate any symptoms of COVID-19.

### 2. Masks

Work isolating employee must always wear a well-fitting 3-layer non-medical mask or a medical mask, except when eating or drinking (see below). Masks must follow current Health Canada and [Nova Scotia Public Health Guidelines](#), and be [worn properly](#) as per Public Health guidance. When the employee is eating or drinking, they should be alone in the room and replace the mask as soon as done.

Respirators (such as N95, KN95 or equivalent) may be used, but note that **any use of a respirator in the workplace requires that the employer have a respiratory protection program established** that covers the selection, use, maintenance, fit testing and training as per section 13 of the Nova Scotia Occupational Health and Safety General Regulations.

Similarly, a 3-layer masks with a filter or a medical mask must be worn by other employees when interacting with the work isolating employee (even if physically distanced).

### 3. Physical Distancing

Employees participating in work isolation should interact remotely with co-workers to the extent possible and limit in-person interactions to essential work purposes. Physical distancing must be maintained at all times. Employees participating in work isolation should work in a separate room or space and must not use shared facilities such as locker rooms, showers, gyms, etc.

Minimize workplace interaction between the work isolating employee and others at the workplace. Whenever possible, communicate via email, phone, other electronic means rather than face-to-face.

Meal and other breaks for work isolating employees must be taken alone in a separate space. A separate non-shared location at the workplace must be provided for each individual on work isolation.

When practical, work isolating employees should be physically separated from others at the workplace.

Physical distance at least 6 feet / 2 metres should be maintained between the work isolating employee and others.

Develop protocols for any workplace or industry specific activities that could result in a high risk of exposure to potential COVID-19 transmission from the work isolating employee to others at the workplace. For example, are there situations where workers must be in close proximity (less than 6 feet / 2 metres) to each other to perform a task. Look at work assignments to see if the work isolation employee can do other tasks that do not require close proximity to others.

Strengthen communication regarding a layered approach. While wearing a mask is important, you still should physically distance, perform hand hygiene, etc.

#### **4. Cleaning and Disinfection**

In any area where the employee removed their mask to eat – all surfaces that the work isolating employees have touched or been in contact with must be cleaned and disinfected before anyone else uses the area.

Increase cleaning and sanitation protocols for work areas, especially high touch surfaces and post shift for the areas in which the work isolating employee was working.

Use disinfectants that have a [DIN \(Drug Identification Number in Canada\) from Health Canada](#) and/or listed on Health Canada's [list](#) of disinfectants with evidence for use against COVID-19. Use products per manufacturer's instruction and that are compatible with equipment/material being cleaned/ disinfected.

#### **5. Procedures for employees with COVID-19 symptoms or signs**

Develop a plan that identifies steps to be taken in the event a work isolating employee becomes symptomatic while in the workplace. If symptoms develop while at work, the work isolating employee must immediately remove themselves from the work area and contact their supervisor or manager. Arrangements must then be made for the work isolating employee to leave the workplace and safely return home. Ideally the employee should transport themselves. Avoid using public transportation (like a taxi, bus or shuttle). See if a family member can drive the work isolating employee home. Maintain masking and a physical distance of 2 metres (6 feet) from others, as much as possible.

Once at home, the work isolating employee must follow Public Health guidance on isolation, testing and notification at [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): symptoms and testing - Government of Nova Scotia, Canada](#).

If symptoms develop at home, follow the above Public Health guidance. The employee may not return to the workplace until they are no longer symptomatic and it is safe for them to do so (see below).

## **6. Other Safety & Health Risks**

Ensure any measures implemented for work isolation do not introduce any additional health and safety risk (such as working alone) to the isolating worker or others. In the event there is an increased health and safety risk, implement additional controls to address that risk.

## **7. Communications and Consultation**

Under the Nova Scotia Occupational Health and Safety Act, employees have a right to be informed of the hazards in the workplace. For the purposes of work isolation, they should be informed when there is an individual(s) participating in work isolation. However, due to medical privacy concerns, they should not be provided information that would specifically identify the work isolating employee.

As per section 31 and section 33 of the Nova Scotia Occupational Health and Safety Act, the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee or the Health and Safety Representative (where they exist) should be involved in the development of the Work Isolation Plan.

## **8. Training**

Employees participating in Work Isolation must be trained on the requirements of the Work Isolation plan and the COVID-19 related procedures they are required to follow.

## **Can an Employee Refuse to Work with a Work Isolating Employee?**

The Nova Scotia OHS Act and regulations supports the Internal Responsibility System, in which health and safety is a joint responsibility, as for other potential workplace hazards employers and employees are encouraged to work together to identify hazards and workable solutions.

Under Section 43 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act everyone has the right to refuse unsafe work any time they have reasonable grounds to believe that the work condition, equipment, material, or any aspect of the work may be dangerous to their own or another person's health and safety. If they feel that working around work isolating individual, even with other controls in place as detailed in the employers Work Isolation Plan, makes it unsafe to work then they can exercise their right to refuse following the process outlined in Section 43 of the Act. That is, report the refusal to their supervisor to be addressed. If not remedied to their satisfaction, then report to Joint Occupational Health & Safety Committee or the Health & Safety representative. And if still not remedied to the employee's satisfaction, then report to Labour Skills and Immigration - OHS Division at 1-800-9LABOUR.

## When Can Work Isolation End?

Employees can return to work without having to follow work isolation protocols under the same timeframe and requirements as for regular at home isolation. The timeframe is dependant on factors such as immunization status and if the person has symptoms or develops symptoms. Please see the following website for up -to-date guidance on timeframes to remain in isolation.

[Information for COVID-19 Close Contacts | Nova Scotia Health Authority \(nshealth.ca\)](https://www.nshealth.ca)

A recovery letter from Public Health, clearing the employee to return to work without restrictions, is **not required** and Public Health does not issue such letters.