



Returning to Safe Operation

COVID-19

Guidelines for

Employers

June 29, 2021

COVID-19 Guidelines for Employers

Effective March 18, 2020, the Minister of Health and Community Services with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador declared COVID-19 a public health emergency under the **Public Health Protection and Promotion Act**. While a public health emergency is in effect, the province's Chief Medical Officer of Health can introduce special measures that they believe are necessary to protect the health of the population.

The OHS Division (Service NL) and WorkplaceNL, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, recognize the importance of worker health and safety as businesses plan to resume operations following COVID-19 related work stoppages or interruptions. To keep within the provincial public health emergency declaration, the following guidelines will apply to all provincially regulated workplaces, and must be followed without exception, until further notice.

This guideline has been written with consideration of Public Health Agency of Canada and Government of Newfoundland and Labrador resources available at the time of release.

Important Update: As of August 24, 2020 the Chief Medical Officer of Health has **ordered** that all individuals must wear a non-medical mask that covers the nose and mouth when in public indoor spaces.

Returning to a new normal

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the way we work, how we manage tasks and how we interact with co-workers, customers or visitors. Jobs within each workplace vary, as does the risk of exposure to and transmission of COVID-19. Understanding these risks will help you to identify appropriate controls to put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to protect your workers.

Employers and business owners must think outside the pre-COVID-19 work environment, and carry out alternative working arrangements, as identified in this guideline.

Preventing the spread of COVID-19

Public health evidence suggests COVID-19 most commonly spreads from an infected person to another person through the following:

- **Close contact:** Breathing in someone's respiratory droplets after they cough, sneeze, laugh or sing.
- **Contaminated surfaces:** Touching something with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes with unwashed hands.
- **Common greetings:** Handshakes, hugs or kisses.

Individuals infected with the COVID-19 virus can transmit the virus to others early in their illness, including the days before they develop symptoms (pre-symptomatic), and up to at least 10 days after they develop symptoms. Some infected individuals may have very mild symptoms, or no symptoms (asymptomatic), but are still able to transmit the virus to others. This means that some infected

individuals will be able to infect others, but may not look or even feel ill themselves. The estimated time between contact with COVID-19 and the appearance of the first sign or symptom is 5 to 6 days on average, but can range from 1 to 14 days.

Public health evidence suggests that COVID-19 causes mild illness in most people (approx.80 per cent), with a smaller proportion of people developing more severe disease including pneumonia, and with some dying. People at higher risk of complications and severe disease include older adults and people with underlying chronic or immunocompromising medical conditions.

To stay healthy and to protect ourselves and others, we must be mindful of the ever-present risk of exposure to the virus. Some settings and situations increase the risk, such as being in:

- Closed spaces with poor ventilation.
- Crowded places where a large number of people gather.
- Close contact where you can't keep two metres apart from others.

Risk reduction strategies

Some workplaces may choose or be required to close, or to have employees work remotely if possible. However, if the workplace is continuing to operate, a combination of strategies must be used to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

The best measures of defense against the spread of COVID-19 are:

- Staying home if you are feeling unwell or experiencing symptoms.
- Restricting visitors and non-essential personnel.
- Clear and frequent communication for all workers and visitors.
- Physical barriers.
- Physical distancing (keep two metres/six feet from others, if possible).
- Good cleaning and hygiene practices.
- Personal protective equipment.

Information on risk reduction strategies are further detailed in the guideline below.

Documentation requirements

Employers must develop documentation or a plan that reduces the risk of exposure to workers and the general public. The plan must include:

- A risk assessment.
- An overview of how the workplace is organized and arranged.
- Specific activities carried out by workers.
- Control measures implemented.
- Communication and training provided to workers, customers, and visitors.
- Detail how the employer will monitor compliance with the guidelines.

COVID-19 Guidelines for Employers

The following steps are provided to help develop a plan to ensure you are minimizing the risk of COVID-19 appropriately, and that your business can operate safely. Note that this information and guidance represents the minimum requirements, and you may identify additional risks and control measures specific to your business.

The OHS Division, during inspections which assess COVID-19 preparedness, will ask to view all written procedures related to the prevention of COVID-19 spread. This will include asking for documentation detailing how an employer will inform all persons of its prevention measures, and monitor adherence to these procedures.

Employers must ensure that workers understand the measures taken to reduce the risk, as many will have concerns about returning to work. Employers must involve workers in the planning process as much as possible to ensure their concerns are heard and addressed.

Step 1: Assess the risk at your workplace

Employers must assess all aspects of the business, considering demographics of the workforce or clientele, location of the workplace, business continuity plans and policies, and the physical environment of the workplace. This process should involve frontline workers, supervisors, and health and safety committees and/or worker health and safety representatives/designates. Employers should continue to assess the workplace after operations resume, to ensure risks are identified and managed.

When assessing the risk of a business, employers must first consider the population or the demographics of the workforce and clientele:

- Are employees or clients from certain demographic groups at greater risk of severe disease, such as older adults or people with underlying medical conditions?
- Are your clients at greater risk of spreading the disease (young children)?
- Are your employees at greater risk of being infected due to recent travel (workers travelling from outside the province)?
- Will employees/clients be participating in activities that promote transmission of the virus?

Consideration must be given to the type of services/work provided in the workplace:

- Does your business provide essential services?
- Do the services you provide have the potential to increase viral transmission?
- What type of services does your business provide (food service, customer service, home visits, etc.)?

Consideration must also be given to the location of the workplace:

- Is the local community experiencing an increased rate of COVID-19 infection?
- Is the local population at increased risk of severe disease if COVID-19 circulated (elderly)?

Employers should review business continuity plans and policies:

- Does your business have a pandemic preparedness plan?
- Does your business have a continuity plan addressing issues like critical operations, prioritization of work/services, surge capacity planning, and cross-training of employees?
- Do you have a risk communication plan to share information with your employees, contractors and clients?
- How will symptomatic individuals in the workplace be handled? How will contacts be handled?
- How will employee absenteeism impact your operations?
- Can your workplace support flexible workplace policies (teleworking arrangements, staggered hours, etc.)?
- Does your business offer mental health support to your employees?

Employers must also assess physical workplaces in order to identify places where the risk of transmission is introduced:

- Does your workplace employ a small or large number of employees?
- Do your workers conduct frequent domestic or international travel?
- In what setting is your workplace located (large public space, community-setting, office, densely or sparsely populated areas)?
- Is work conducted indoors, outdoors or both?
- Where do workers congregate (break rooms, production lines, meeting rooms)?
- Are there work tasks or processes that require workers to come into close proximity with one another, or members of the public?
- Can your workplace infrastructure be easily altered/modified to implement public health, and infection prevention and control measures (additional hand cleaning stations, spatial separation of 2-metre between workstations)?
- Are materials exchanged (money, credit cards, paperwork, etc.)?
- What tools, machinery, and equipment do workers come into contact with, in the course of their work?
- Which surfaces are touched often (bathroom facilities, turnstiles, doorknobs, elevator buttons, light switches, equipment, and shared tools)?

Employers should review workplace cleaning procedures:

- Does your workplace and business have existing environmental cleaning procedures and protocols? Can they be enhanced to align with public health advice?
- Will high-touch surfaces be cleaned and disinfected frequently, using appropriate cleaners and approved disinfectants?

Step 2: Implement measures to reduce risk

Employers must select and put measures in place to minimize the risk of viral transmission. Employers should review the following information and guidance:

- Industry-specific protocols on the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador COVID-19 website including [**Information Sheets for Businesses and Workplaces**](#) to determine whether any relevant

COVID-19 Guidelines for Employers

updates apply to your industry. Guidance for additional sectors will be posted as they become available. If protocols are developed specific to your sector, implement these to the extent that they are applicable to the risks at your workplace. You may need to identify and implement additional protocols if the posted protocols do not address all the risks to your workers or the public.

- Orders, guidance, and notices issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health and relevant to your industry.
- Your health and safety association, or other professional and industry associations.
- Frontline workers, supervisors, and your occupational health and safety committee (or worker health and safety representative/designate).

Encourage employees to stay home, if feeling unwell

All employees, contractors, and visitors, including essential workers, should be instructed to stay at home if they are feeling unwell. If a person experiences symptoms while at work:

- Plan for rapid isolation of a symptomatic employee.
- Identify an area where employees/clients can be isolated if they become ill at the workplace.
- Instruct the person to go home as soon as possible, avoid public transportation and take measures to protect others around them.
- Recommend they call 811, or complete the self-assessment tool <https://www.811healthline.ca/covid-19-self-assessment/>.

Travel restrictions

All individuals arriving in Newfoundland and Labrador from outside the province must follow requirements issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

For more information, please visit the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador COVID-19 website at <https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/>.

Maintain physical distance

- Limiting the number of people in a workplace is an important way to maintain **physical distancing**, in accordance with public health directives. This may be done by implementing work-from-home schedules or rescheduling some work tasks.
- Ensure that the number of people in each area of a workplace is adequate to prevent workers from coming too close to one another, or members of the public. This may be done by posting occupancy limits (e.g., on elevators, washrooms, and other small spaces), and limiting the number of workers at one time in break locations.
- Revise work schedules and reorganize work tasks to maintain a distance of two metres between workers and others wherever possible. Shifts should be alternated or production levels should be lowered in order to achieve physical distancing. Stagger start, break and end times for employees.

- Implement measures to ensure workers can maintain a distance of two metres when serving or working with or near members of the public (floor markings as to appropriate paths of travel and standing positions to maintain physical distancing).
- The **COVID-19 Alert Level System**, directed by the provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health, clarifies the public health measures for public spaces and mass gatherings. While the guidelines do not dictate the number of employees allowed to be present in the workplace, adherence to gathering limits is required for any meetings/groupings of workers.
- In-person meetings, within the maximum the number of individuals, is not recommended as there is a higher risk of viral transmission in enclosed spaces, such as meeting rooms, as compared to larger areas with more ventilation. It is recommended that in-person meetings be done by video or teleconference, if possible.

Where physical distance cannot be maintained

- Where distance cannot be maintained, consider separating people with physical barriers such as partitions or plexiglass barriers.
- Where other measures are not sufficient, consider the use of non-medical masks or face coverings, in work settings where medical masks or respirators are not required. Employers should understand that different masks and respirators have differing benefits and limitations.
- Consider active screening - seeking information to determine the health status of people entering and exiting the workplace.

Fitness for work

Prior to the start of work, the employer must:

- Review the latest guidance from the Chief Medical Officer of Health, and adjust work practices accordingly.
- Ensure workers are pre-screened prior to entering the site or workplace. Pre-screening should also be performed for persons who may come into contact with workers where physical distancing measures cannot be maintained (dentists, salons/barbershops, etc.). A COVID-19 “Fit for Work Questionnaire” is included in this guide.

Cleaning and personal hygiene

- Develop policies around when workers must wash their hands, including upon arriving for work, before and after breaks, after handling cash or other materials, after using the washroom, when preparing food and after handling common tools and equipment.
- Remove any unnecessary tools or equipment that may elevate the risk of viral transmission, or ensure they are adequately cleaned between uses/persons or that persons handling them wear gloves and practice good hand hygiene.
- Proper hand washing and sanitation are needed to limit the spread of COVID-19. Provide access to hand washing stations and/or hand sanitizer to every employee on site.
- Inform and remind employees of **effective handwashing techniques**, to avoid touching their face, and to practice proper respiratory etiquette (cough into their elbow or a tissue and immediately dispose of the tissue).

COVID-19 Guidelines for Employers

- Implement a cleaning protocol for all common areas and surfaces, including barriers, washrooms, equipment, tools, common tables, desks, light switches, electronics and door handles. Ensure those engaged in cleaning have adequate training and materials.
- Increase the cleaning frequency of high-touch areas, washrooms and lunch rooms (cleaning twice daily).
- Public spaces that are visibly dirty must be cleaned first, and then disinfected. Some products (such as premixed store-bought disinfectant cleaning solutions and/or wipes) can clean and disinfect all at once, and may be more practical. See [COVID-19 Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings](#) for further information.
- Approved hard-surface disinfectants that have Drug Identification Number (DIN) are suggested to be used. A DIN is an 8-digit number given by Health Canada that confirms the disinfectant product is approved and safe for use in Canada. A [diluted bleach solution](#) is also acceptable to limit the transfer of microorganisms. See Health Canada's [list of hard surface disinfectants](#) that are likely to be effective for use against COVID-19.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

- Medical masks, including surgical, medical procedure face masks and respirators (like N95 masks), must be kept for health care workers and others providing direct care to COVID-19 patients, unless normal work practices or workplace conditions necessitate that respirators be worn.
- Wearing a non-medical mask or face coverings should be evaluated by the employer during the risk assessment process. If an employer should determine a mask or face covering is required they may refer to Health Canada's guidelines on wearing non-medical masks and how to make your own face covering.
- Masks alone will not prevent the spread of COVID-19. Employers must consistently and strictly adhere to good hygiene and public health measures, including frequent hand washing and physical distancing.
- Gloves are recommended when workers will be in direct contact with an ill person, or a contaminated object or environment.
- Misuse of gloves and other PPE increases risk of infection due to improper handling of potentially contaminated gloves and equipment. If they must be worn because staff may come in contact with contaminated material they must be applied correctly.
- If PPE is recommended through the risk assessment process, the worker must receive training on its use, including putting it on (donning) and taking it off (doffing). The PPE must be used correctly in the workplace at all times.
- Important update: as of August 24, 2020 the Chief Medical Officer of Health has [ordered](#) that all individuals must wear a non-medical mask that covers the nose and mouth when in public indoor spaces.

Step 3: Develop policies, procedures and protocols

Develop the necessary policies to manage your workplace, including policies around who can be at the workplace, how to address illness that arises at the workplace, and how workers can be kept safe in adjusted working conditions.

The Chief Medical Officer of Health has issued guidance around self-isolation that must be reflected in your policies, procedures and protocols. For up-to-date guidance, visit <https://gov.nl.ca/covid-19/public-health-guidance/covis-91/symptoms/>.

The policies should also clearly outline the following:

- Prohibit or limit visitors.
- A process for workers who may start to feel ill while at work, including who they should notify and how they will travel from the workplace to their home.
- Procedures for workers working alone to reduce the risk of viral transmission, and/or work from home procedures to ensure workers are working safely.
- Ensure workers have the training and strategies required to address the risk of violence that may arise as customers and members of the public adapt to restrictions or modifications to the workplace. Ensure an appropriate violence prevention program is in place to prevent contact.
- Evaluate workplace policies and procedures to reduce physical contact, such as teleworking arrangements, flexible hours, staggering start times, use of email and teleconferencing.

Step 4: Develop communication plans and training

Employers must ensure that everyone entering the workplace, including employees from other employers, know how to keep themselves safe while at your workplace.

- Be sure everyone is trained on the measures put in place and the policies around staying home when sick.
- Post signage, including occupancy limits and effective hygiene practices. Signage should also be posted at the main entrance indicating who is restricted from entering the premises (including visitors and employees with symptoms).
- Ensure workers are adequately supervised to ensure they know what to do.
- Train workers in the proper use of masks or face coverings.
- Make sure workers who are cleaning have adequate training and materials.
- Supervisors have been trained on monitoring workers and the workplace to ensure policies and procedures are being followed.

Step 5: Monitor your workplace and update your plans as needed

Things may change as your business operates. If you identify a new area of concern, or if it seems like something is not working, take steps to update your policies and procedures. Involve workers in this process.

Ensure that workers can raise safety concerns. This may be through a worker health and safety representative/designate in workplaces or through an occupational health and safety committee.

Step 6: Assess and address risks from resuming operations

If your workplace has not been operating, there may be risks arising from restarting your business that you need to manage. Consider the following:

- Have you had any staff turnover, or are workers required to change or adapt job roles, or to use new equipment? These workers must be orientated to the workplace and their job desks.
- Will workers need time or training to refresh their skills after having been out of the workplace?
- Have you changed anything about the way you operate, such as the equipment you use or the products you create?
- Are there any processes required for start-up that might introduce risks? Consider the impact of restarting machinery, tools and equipment, or clearing systems and lines of product that may have been left when your business was closed.

Resolving concerns about unsafe work

Workers have the right to refuse work if they believe conditions are unsafe. For COVID-19, unsafe work would be where a worker's role places them at increased risk of exposure, and adequate controls are not in place to protect them from that exposure.

If the matter is not resolved between the worker and the supervisor, the right to refuse must be reviewed by the Occupational Health and Safety Committee or Worker Health and Safety Representative/Designate. If the issues remain unresolved, the employer and/or worker must contact OHS Division at Service NL, as per the stipulations of section 47 of the OHS Act and section 5 of the OHS regulations. Once that occurs, an Occupational Health and Safety Officer will consult with workplace parties to determine whether there is unsafe work and issue orders if necessary.

Protecting mental health

Workers in the workplace may also be affected by the anxiety and uncertainty created by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to remember that mental health is just as important as physical health, and to take measures to support workers' mental well-being. Here are some resources that can assist with maintaining mental health in the workplace during this time.

- **COVID-19: Managing Stress During the Pandemic:** Government of Newfoundland and Labrador tips to manage stress and stay healthy during this time of pandemic.
- **The latest covid-19 news/resources:** (Canadian Mental Health Association – NL) Tips and information on how to reduce and manage anxiety due to the COVID-19 outbreak.
- **Psychological Health and Safety** (WorkplaceNL) Resources to assist in implementing the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.

- **Mental Health and Psychosocial Considerations During COVID-19 Outbreak:** (World Health Organization) The WHO's Department of Mental Health and Substance Use developed these considerations to support the mental and psychosocial well-being of different groups during COVID-19 outbreak.
- **Mental Health and COVID-19:** (Conference Board of Canada) – Videos on different aspects of mental health, including coping with anxiety, job loss, and dealing with isolation.
- **Taking Care of Your Mental Health:** (Public Health Agency of Canada) – Tips and resources for taking care of your mental health during the COVID-19 outbreak.

If you have a question or concern

Digital Government and Service NL, Occupational Health and Safety Division

Workers and employers with questions or concerns about the adequacy of COVID-19 safety measures in the workplace can call OHS Division at 709.729.2706 or toll free at 1.800.563.5471.

WorkplaceNL

Health and Safety Advisors at WorkplaceNL are available to provide guidance and education on risk assessments and the development COVID-19 safety plans. Webinars are available to employers and workers on working safely through COVID-19. Please call 709.778.1000 or toll free at 1.800.563.9000.

Additional Resources

- <https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/>
Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial Government Covid-19 website
- <https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/files/Guidance-for-Workplaces.pdf>
Guidance for Employers
- **Business Continuity Plan**
Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety
- **Infectious Disease Outbreaks/Pandemic Resources**
Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety. This is information and guidance issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health in Newfoundland and Labrador.
- <https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/files/Guidance-on-Personal-Protective-Equipment-PPE-for-Employers.pdf>
Guidance on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Employers
- <https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/information-sheets-for-businesses-and-workplaces/>
Guidance for Employers Operating During COVID-19

COVID-19 Guidelines for Employers

- <https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/files/Physical-Distancing-for-Businesses.pdf>
Physical Distancing for Businesses
- **Special Measures Order (Masks)**
Declaration of requirement for masks in indoor public spaces.

COVID-19: Fit for Work Questionnaire

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, workers should be pre-screened prior to entering the site or workplace. Pre-screening should also be performed for persons who may come into contact with workers where physical distancing measures cannot be maintained.

Employers should retain all completed forms for a period of one year.

Date (yyyy/mm/dd):	Name (last, first):
Business Name:	Work/Site Location (street address):

Self-Declaration by Worker/Visitor		Please Circle One	
1.	Do you (worker or visitor) have one or more of following possible COVID-19 symptoms (new or worsening): <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fever (including chills/sweats)• Cough (new or worsening)• Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing• Runny, stuffy or congested nose (not related to seasonal allergies or other known causes/conditions)• Sore throat or difficulty swallowing• Headache• Acute loss of sense of smell or taste• Unusual fatigue, lack of energy• New onset of muscle aches• Loss of appetite• Vomiting or diarrhea for more than 24 hours• Small red or purple spots on hands and/or feet (this symptom applies to children only)	YES	NO
2.	Have you been in close contact with a known or suspected case of COVID-19 in the last 14 days?	YES	NO
3.	Have you travelled outside of Newfoundland and Labrador in the last 14 days? If yes, which province or country? _____	YES	NO

COVID-19 Guidelines for Employers

4.	Have you been in close contact with anyone who has travelled outside of the Newfoundland and Labrador in the past 14 days who has developed COVID-19 symptoms?	YES	NO
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If the answer is "Yes" to any of the above questions, please **DO NOT** enter the work place at this time. **Stay home.** Use the **COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool**, call 811 or contact your health care provider.

NOTE: If someone in your house is self-isolating and **DOES NOT** have COVID-19 symptoms you CAN attend the workplace. If someone in your house is self-isolating and **DOES** have COVID-19 symptoms call 811 and follow advice from the public health official.

For more information visit: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/>

Acknowledgment

I (print name) _____ acknowledge information that I have provided in COVID-19: Fit for Work Questionnaire is correct.

Signature: _____

Date: _____