

Preventing COVID-19 in the workplace: Employers, employees and essential service workers



Across Canada, we are taking extraordinary steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19. For some workplaces, this may mean changing or limiting their hours of operation, or even closing for a period of time. Many employees have been told to stay at home, and others have been asked to work from home, while still others are asked to continue to go to work because their jobs are essential to keeping Canada functioning during this outbreak.

Essential workers are considered critical to preserving life, health and basic societal functioning. This includes, but is not limited to, first responders, health care workers, critical infrastructure workers, hydro and natural gas, and workers who are essential to supply society by critical goods such as food and medicines.

While all employees should continue to practice **physical distancing** and **hygiene** in their personal lives, we also need to take additional measures to protect important workplaces and employees, who are providing essential services. Employers and employees will need to work together to protect the health of employees and clients, and to keep the workplace delivering its essential services.

Employers should use the risk-informed decision-making [guidelines for workplaces/businesses](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For all employees

All employees should ensure they understand and comply with the infection prevention policies and practices in place in their workplaces.

Keep your hands clean

- › **Wash your hands** often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- › If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- › Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- › Cough or sneeze into the bend of your arm.
- › Avoid touching surfaces people touch often.
- › Instead of a handshake, give a friendly wave or elbow bump.
- › Use any necessary personal protective equipment, as directed.

Keep your environment clean

- › Use appropriate **products to clean and disinfect** items like your desk, work surface, phones, keyboards and electronics, cash registers, keypads, elevator buttons, customer service counters and restaurant tables more often, especially when visibly dirty.
- › If they can withstand the use of liquids for disinfection, frequently touched electronics such as phones, computers and other devices may be disinfected with 70% alcohol (e.g. alcohol prep wipes).



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Keep your distance

- › Keep a distance of 2 metres between you, your coworkers, and customers.
- › Increase distance between desks, tables and workstations.
- › Reduce activities that require close physical proximity or contact with people, such as team meetings.
- › Limit any contacts closer than 2 metres to the shortest time possible.

If you have a symptom of COVID-19

- › If you think you might have COVID-19, use our [self-assessment tool](#) to find out what to do.
- › It is critical that, if you have one symptom of COVID-19 (fever, cough or difficulty breathing), or even mild symptoms, you should stay home to avoid spreading illness to others.
- › If you develop even mild [symptoms](#) while at your workplace, separate yourself from others and go home, avoiding use of public transit (e.g. buses, train, taxi) if possible.
- › Contact your local [Public Health Authority](#) and follow their advice.
- › If you are concerned about your financial stability during this time, the Government of Canada is providing assistance.

For employers

Establish policies to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace and make sure these are communicated and understood by employees:

- › Use the risk-informed decision-making [guidelines for workplaces/businesses](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- › Increase communication to staff and your customers about COVID-19 and measures you are taking for prevention.
- › Post signs asking ill clients or customers to stay away from the workplace.
- › Post signs encouraging good respiratory hygiene, hand hygiene, and other healthy practices
- › Where feasible, adjust policies and procedures to reduce social contact, such as teleworking arrangements, flexible hours, staggering start times, use of email and teleconferencing.

- › Cancel or postpone all non-essential meetings or travel.
- › Evaluate the workplace for areas where people have frequent contact with each other and share spaces and objects, and increase the frequency of [cleaning and disinfecting](#) in these areas.
- › Consider ways that employees can practice physical distancing, such as increasing distance between desks, people in line-ups and workstations.
- › Consider minimizing interactions between customers and your employees, such as limiting the number of customers permitted in your establishment or serving customers over the phone. Ideally, a 2-metre separation should be maintained, unless there is a physical barrier (e.g. cubicle, Plexiglas window).

Provide the necessary facilities and [cleaning and disinfecting](#) products to maintain a clean and safe workplace:

- › Provide access to handwashing facilities and place hand sanitizing dispensers in prominent locations throughout the workplace.
- › Ensure that high traffic work areas or frequently touched surfaces are cleaned and disinfected more often.
- › Ensure that [cleaning and disinfecting](#) supplies are available for employees to clean and disinfect their workspaces.
- › Provide employees with any personal protective equipment recommended by occupational health and safety guidelines, and training to ensure it is used correctly.

Make sure employees know what to do when they have symptoms:

- › Consider relaxing sick leave policies for employees who are ill. This includes suspending the need for medical notes to return to work, as it reduces the burden on an already stressed health care system.
- › If employees must use public transportation to come to work, consider flexible hours to allow them to avoid peak travel periods.
- › Consider how employees will return home without using public transit if they develop symptoms at work.
- › Prepare for increases in absenteeism due to illness among employees and their families or possible school closures.

Work-related travel

- › Non-essential travel should not occur at this time.
- › Consider the risks and benefits related to any upcoming essential travel and evaluate other options, such as postponing, cancelling or participating virtually.
- › Check the latest information on affected areas and any [travel health notices](#).
- › When you return from [any travel outside Canada](#), you must self-isolate for 14 days.
- › When you return from [travel within Canada](#), monitor yourself for symptoms, such as a cough, fever or difficulty breathing for 14 days.
- › If you develop even mild [symptoms](#), such as cough, fever or difficulty breathing, [isolate yourself](#) at home and contact your local [Public Health Authority](#) for further instructions.

Work-related travel for essential workers

Certain persons who cross the border regularly to ensure the continued flow of goods and essential services, or individuals who receive or provide other essential services to Canadians, are exempt from needing to quarantine (self-isolate) due to travel outside of Canada, as long as they are asymptomatic (do not have symptoms of COVID-19).

You must:

- › practice [physical \(social\) distancing](#)
- › self-monitor for [symptoms](#)
- › stay in your place of residence as much as possible
- › follow the instructions of your local [public health authority](#) if you feel sick

We can all do our part in preventing the spread of COVID-19. For more information, visit

Canada.ca/coronavirus
or contact 1-833-784-4397