

Workplace Sanitary Standards Guide for the School System (Preschool, Elementary, Secondary, General Adult Education and Vocational Training) – COVID-19

OHS is everyone's business!



The purpose of this guide is to support the work environments of the school network (preschool, elementary, secondary, general adult education, vocational training, including administrative and professional staff) for management of occupational health and safety (OHS). The information contained in this guide is taken from the interim recommendations produced by the Réseau de santé publique en santé au travail (RSPSAT) and the Institut national de santé publique du Québec (INSPQ) and specifies the CNESST's expectations related to [these recommendations](#).

The proposed measures must be adapted to guarantee that operations can resume or continue under the safest and healthiest possible conditions in the context of COVID-19.

In a crisis period, it is important that workers, employers and other players in the school system collaborate to have healthy and safe work environments for all! Dialogue and cooperation are essential to achieve this.



Management of occupational health and safety

Management means implementing the necessary measures to honour the employer's legal obligations, namely identify, correct and control the risks and encourage the workers' participation in this preventive approach.

Good cooperation between the employer and the staff is essential to encourage management of OHS.



The employer must **proceed with identification of the risks of transmission of COVID-19 in the work environment**. If the risks of contamination cannot be eliminated, the employer must seek to reduce and control them. The employer must identify the tasks during which workers may be exposed to the virus. The suppliers, subcontractors, partners, parents, students and pupils have been informed of the measures implemented in the company to control the risks associated with COVID-19 and made aware of the importance of complying with these measures.

The preventive measures that may be applied are based on the principles of exclusion of symptomatic persons from the workplace, physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and maintenance of hygiene measures for the material, tools, equipment and frequently touched surfaces.

The COVID-19 context can be a major stress factor, whether for the employer or for the workers, suppliers, subcontractors, partners, parents, students and pupils, due to the upheaval it causes in the different spheres of society. Special attention must therefore be paid to the [psychological health](#) of the staff.



Exclusion of symptomatic workers from the workplace

Persons exhibiting symptoms are part of the COVID-19 transmission chain in the workplace. Procedures accounting for the following factors can avoid transmission of the disease:

- Identification of workers with COVID-19 symptoms before they enter the workplace, by means such as:
 - a [questionnaire](#),
 - self-evaluation by the workers;

The information collected in this way is confidential. The employer must take the necessary measures to protect the confidentiality of this information;

- Visiting schools is forbidden for any person exhibiting symptoms associated with the disease (according to the [government website](#)) and any person who was recently diagnosed with COVID-19 or who is waiting for a result, or who has been instructed to self-isolate at home;
- Any person whose home contact exhibits symptoms of COVID-19 or who is under investigation and waiting for test results or who recently was diagnosed with COVID-19 must refer to the [recommendations of the INSPQ](#).

When symptoms associated with the disease appear in the school environment:

- A COVID-19 emergency kit prepared in advance must be used and contain at least gloves, procedure masks, protective eyewear, a reclosable bag, an overgarment (smock), and a hydroalcoholic solution with an alcohol concentration of at least 60%.
- A student, pupil or staff member exhibiting symptoms associated with COVID-19 must be isolated in a room provided for this purpose and wear a procedure mask. Since this person must be removed from the environment, a call to 1-877-644-4545 will obtain directions for the symptomatic person and the educational environment. The parents of a minor child are notified;
- Only one staff member looks after a student or pupil exhibiting symptoms for the time until the parent comes to get the student or pupil;

- During supervision of the student or pupil exhibiting symptoms, the staff member must wear a procedure mask and protective eyewear (protective glasses or visor). If the staff member must have physical contact with the student or pupil, the staff member must also wear an overgarment (gown) and gloves;
- The personal objects of a student, pupil or staff member who has symptoms should be handed over to that person before departure in a fabric or plastic bag;
- When the student, pupil or staff member exhibiting symptoms has left the premises, ventilate the room for a minimum of 3 hours, then clean and disinfect the room, the objects and the surfaces touched by this person with appropriate products and with the required protective equipment¹;
- Staff members must remove the protective equipment safely² in the room and discard the single-use equipment on site (if a trash can without contact with the hands is available) or in reclosable bags or containers for this purpose. Reusable personal protective equipment (e.g. protective eyewear) is disinfected with a product adapted to the equipment. They must wash their hands immediately after this.

If a case is suspected (e.g. departure of a person), the parents of the pupils in the group of the pupil affected, the staff member responsible for isolation and the staff member who was in contact with this person must call the Direction régionale de la santé publique to obtain instructions;

- The results of the public health investigation will make it possible to determine whether the people who have been in contact with the symptomatic person can return to the educational institution or must self-isolate.

For more information on case management and periods of isolation, you can consult the INSPQ publication titled "[Guide pour la gestion des cas et des contacts de COVID-19](#)" (INSPQ Guide for case and contact management of COVID-19) in daycare services and in preschool, primary and secondary schools.



Physical distancing

- Whenever possible, the staff member maintains a minimum distance of 2 metres from other persons (e.g. colleagues and students);
- This distance must also be maintained during breaks and lunch hour;
- Handshakes and hugs must be avoided;
- The workstations and work methods have been reviewed to comply with 2 metres of physical distancing whenever possible between staff members and between a staff member and the students or pupils;
- Posters are installed as reminders of the importance of hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and physical distancing at key locations (entrance, rooms, washrooms, exterior doors, etc.);

¹ Resources are available online for more information concerning [cleaning of surfaces](#) or the recommended disinfectants.

² Resources are available online for more information concerning [cleaning of surfaces](#) or the [safe removal of protective equipment](#).

- The suppliers, subcontractors, partners, parents, students and pupils have been informed of the measures implemented in the school to control the risks associated with COVID-19 and make them aware of the importance of respecting these measures and limiting their movements within the school facility as much as possible;
- The common areas where the pupils gather are strictly controlled by monitors, teachers or educators, for example. The physical distancing measures are applied. Entrances and exits are managed closely.

Adjustments must be made to limit the risk of transmission when the principles of physical distancing cannot be respected:

In the offices, for the staff:

- review the organization of work to encourage the use of the technological means available whenever possible (e.g. telework);
- install physical barriers (full partitions) between the different workstations that are too close to each other or that cannot be spaced at least 2 metres apart, for example, service counters and secretariat where there is contact with the clientele (e.g. pupil, parent, etc.).

In indoor and outdoor common areas for staff (e.g., staff rooms, facility grounds, etc.):

- In areas that have reached the maximum alert level (red zone), the wearing of the procedure mask is mandatory for all personnel at all times.

In the rooms of the institution:

- measures must be taken to encourage physical distancing between staff members and the student or pupil;
- the schedules must be adjusted to minimize bottlenecks and gatherings;
- according to the MSSS [recommendations](#), wearing protective equipment (procedure mask and protective eyewear) is unnecessary for a teacher if 2 metres of physical distancing is maintained;
- if the tasks require less than 2 metres of distancing from another person without physical barriers, the staff member must wear the appropriate protective equipment, procedure mask and protective eyewear (protective glasses or visor). When there are risks of unexpected projections or the possibility of intermittent and unforeseeable interactions (e.g. contact with pupils with special needs), wearing protective equipment is recommended throughout the interaction period;
- the necessary protective equipment [procedure mask and protective eyewear (protective glasses or visor)] must be made available to the staff in sufficient quantities for situations where the minimum 2 metres of physical distancing cannot be maintained.

In school transportation:

- the pupils' parents are informed that they must keep their children at home and refrain from having them take school transportation if they exhibit symptoms, if they were diagnosed recently with COVID-19, if they are waiting for test results or if they have been instructed to self-isolate at home;
- if physical barriers (transparent full partitions) cannot be installed between the driver and the pupils, access to the front benches is prohibited to maintain the minimum 2 metres of distancing;
- a sufficient quantity of necessary protective equipment, procedure mask and protective eyewear (protective glasses or visor covering the face down to the chin), must be made available to the driver;
- the driver must wear the appropriate protective equipment [procedure mask and protective eyewear (protective glasses or visor covering the face down to the chin)] if the task requires being within 2 metres of a pupil or student in the absence of physical barriers;
- suitable ventilation in the vehicle is ensured by avoiding air recirculation and encouraging opening of windows whenever possible, for example;
- the driver's station is cleaned and disinfected every shift or during a change of driver (e.g. steering wheel, interior and exterior door handles, interior mirror, seat belts, doors, seat);
- the frequently touched surfaces in the vehicles are cleaned and disinfected every day (e.g. seat belts, straps, handrails, buzzers, doors, seats);
- whenever possible, use of a vehicle is limited to only one driver (the same vehicle for the entire shift).

For vocational training:

- for additional information concerning certain specific programs (hairdressing, welding, machining, cooking, etc.), you can consult the generic kit or the sector kits ([personal care and aesthetic services](#), [manufacturing](#), [restaurant](#), etc.).

Other services in the school environment:

- for childcare activities in the school, refer to the [Workplace Sanitary Standards Guide for Childcare Services](#);
- for school establishments with a food service counter, refer to the [Workplace Sanitary Standards Guide for the Restaurant and Bar Sectors](#);
- for additional information concerning the use of gymnasiums and sports equipment, consult the [Workplace Sanitary Standards Guide for the Indoor and Outdoor Sports, Recreation and Open Air Activities Sector](#).



Hand hygiene

Frequent hand washing with soap and water or with a hydroalcoholic solution with an alcohol concentration of at least 60% for at least 20 seconds limits the risks of transmission in the work environment, specially:

- before touching the face (eyes, nose, mouth);
- after coughing, sneezing or wiping the nose;
- upon arrival in the morning and before departure each day;
- before and after eating;
- after handling something that is frequently touched or a package received;
- before putting on and removing protective equipment;
- when entering and exiting the premises and after each use of collective equipment.

Disposable paper towels and a contactless trash can must also be provided during hand washing with soap and water.

All staff members, students and pupils must have been made aware of hand hygiene.



Respiratory etiquette

Respecting respiratory etiquette consists of:

- covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze, and using tissues or the crook of your elbow;
- using single-use tissues;
- immediately discarding used tissues in the trash can;
- frequent hand washing;
- not touching your mouth or eyes with your gloved or bare hands.

All staff members and pupils must have been made aware of respiratory etiquette.



Maintenance of hygiene measures for material, tools, equipment and frequently touched surfaces

Given that the virus responsible for COVID-19 can live on surfaces, application of hygiene measures is essential:

- Limit sharing of work accessories and equipment (e.g. pens, telephone, tablets, computer mouse);
- Clean and disinfect collective equipment (e.g. telephone, computer, mouse, photocopier, printer) between uses by staff members or between uses by each subgroup of pupils;

- Ensure the efficient operation and maintenance of the ventilation systems. Increase the fresh air intake provided by these systems, and in case of natural ventilations, encourage opening of the windows, if possible;
- Clean and disinfect the sanitary facilities daily or more often, depending on the traffic;
- Clean the meal areas before each meal and disinfect them daily. For example:
 - refrigerator door handle,
 - chair backs,
 - microwaves;
- Clean and disinfect the frequently touched surfaces with a disinfection product usually used (according to the manufacturer’s instructions for dilution and personal protective equipment) every day or more often, depending on the use of the premises and when they are visibly soiled. For example:
 - tables,
 - chairs,
 - rooms,
 - sanitary facilities,
 - any other relevant location or material;
- Remove non-essential objects from the common areas.

Resources are available online for more information concerning [cleaning of surfaces](#) or the [recommended disinfectants](#).



Legal obligations

The legal obligations in occupational health and safety, both for the employer and the workers, must be applied in the context of COVID-19. Here is a summary.

Employer

Every employer has the obligation to protect the health and ensure the safety and physical well-being of their workers. The *Act respecting occupational health and safety* (AOHS) requires every employer to take the necessary measures to achieve this ([section 51](#)). To do this, the employer, in particular, must implement methods for the identification, correction and control of risks.

In the context of COVID-19, the employer must ensure that the preventive measures usually implemented are always adapted. Otherwise, he must modify them to protect the workers against the risks of contamination.

The employer must also inform the workers about the risks related to their work, including those related to COVID-19. The employer must also assure the workers of the appropriate training, supervision and coaching so that everyone has the skills and knowledge required to perform the work assigned to them safely.

Worker

Every worker has the obligation to protect their health, safety or physical well-being, and to ensure that they do not endanger the health, safety or physical well-being of other persons found in the workplace ([section 49](#) of the AOHS). To do this, they must comply with the rules and measures implemented in the context of COVID-19 on the same basis as the other rules applied in the work environment. The workers must also participate in the identification and elimination of risks. If they see risks or have suggestions in this regard, they must inform the health and safety committee (if there is one), their superior or a representative of the employer.

Acknowledgments

- Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur
- Quebec English School Boards Association
- Fédération autonome de l'enseignement
- Centrale des syndicats du Québec
- Fédération des centres de services scolaires du Québec
- Confédération des syndicats nationaux
- Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec
- Institut national de santé publique (INSPQ)

The guide and the kit result from a reflective process intended to support the work environments in management of occupational health and safety in the context of COVID-19. The project is scalable and will harmonize with the preventive measures ordered by the Direction générale de la santé publique, du ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux.

For more information, we invite you to consult the recommendations of the Réseau de santé publique en santé au travail published on the [Institut national de santé publique website](#).

Original version in French

Reproduction authorized subject to mention of the source

© Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail, 2020

Legal deposit – Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, 2020

Legal deposit – Library and Archives Canada, 2020

ISBN 978-2-550-87804-9 (PDF)

COVID-19 Hotline: 1-877-644-4545

To contact a CNESST inspector: 1-844-838-0808