

Workplace Guide to Sanitary Standards – COVID-19

OHS is everyone's business!



The purpose of this guide is to support management of occupational health and safety (OHS) in the work environments. 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 in relation to [these recommendations](#).

The proposed measures must be adapted by the different sectors to their specific conditions 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 workplace 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 personnel, including the members of the health and safety committee, as applicable, is crucial to promoting management of OHS. The workers' representatives, particularly the members of the health and safety committee, as well as the prevention representatives, as applicable, can help identify everyday risky situations, evaluate the real feasibility of the actions envisioned, encourage their implementation and anticipate practical questions. They can also participate in dissemination of the information to their co-workers. When a health and safety committee is present, it would be expedient to analyze the possibility of adjusting the frequency of the meetings to the context of the work environment.

It is also important to inform **the suppliers, subcontractors, partners and customers** of the measures implemented in relation to COVID-19 and the importance of compliance with these measures, and to solicit their cooperation.

The result of the preventive approach allows proactive intervention when planning a safe resumption or continuation of operations while honouring the legal obligations. This also allows **updating of the prevention program**, as needed.

After identifying the risks related to contamination in the context of COVID-19 in your work environment, it is important to **implement the preventive measures recommended by the public health authorities and the occupational health and safety experts**.

When the preventive measures are chosen and implemented, it must be ensured that they remain in place and effective. This is called “permanency of corrective action”. In addition to applying the preventive measures specific to COVID-19, the employer must also consider the other risks related to his usual operations, new operations and ad hoc operations (e.g. work reorganization, restoration of machines to operation, maintenance, verifications).

To propose specific tools to identify the risks and the preventive and control measures in the context of COVID-19, the CNESST has provided quick references and checklists to support the work environments in the management of occupational health and safety.

Biological risk: COVID-19



Transmission mode

Coronaviruses usually infect the nose, throat and lungs. They are spread most often by droplets transmitted by an infected person, whether symptomatic or not, when this person coughs or sneezes, for example. They can also be spread by contaminated hands. Thus, touching your mouth, nose or eyes after having been in contact with an infected person or a contaminated surface is a way of developing COVID-19.

Coronaviruses will last a few hours on inert objects with dry surfaces and a few days on inert objects with moist surfaces.



Preventive measures

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.

Preventive measures may be applied to reduce the risks of transmission of COVID-19. They 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 tools, equipment and frequently touched surfaces.



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:

- The workers are informed that in case of symptoms of cough or fever, difficulty breathing, sudden loss of smell or taste without nasal congestion or any other [symptom associated with COVID-19](#), they must not report to work;
- 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;

- When a person exhibits symptoms associated with COVID-19, as indicated on the [government website](#), that person must wear a procedure mask and be isolated in a room immediately. Since this person must be removed from the workplace, a call to 1-877-644-4545 will provide him/her with instructions;
- Once the person exhibiting symptoms has left, prohibit access to the isolation room waiting to clean it and disinfect the surfaces and objects touched by the person;
- Workers who test positive for COVID-19 must notify their employer according to the instructions received from the Direction générale de la santé publique;
- The employer must cooperate with the epidemiological investigations initiated by the Direction générale de la santé publique;
- The results of the investigation by the Direction générale de la santé publique will make it possible to determine whether the people who have been in contact with the symptomatic person can report to work or must self-isolate;



Physical distancing

- Whenever possible, a minimum of 2 metres¹ of distancing between people must be maintained at work, from arrival to departure;
- This distance must also be maintained during breaks and lunch hour;
- Handshakes, hugs and other physical contact must be avoided.

¹ Two-metre distancing or use of physical barriers must always be preferred. A brief interaction, such as encountering someone in a corridor and a stairway without protective equipment, represents a negligible and acceptable risk. The INSPQ recommends that the accumulation of brief interactions with someone not exceed a maximum of 15 minutes per shift. This limit should be interpreted as a benchmark for unexpected situations that cannot maintain this distance despite efforts. It is suggested that the workplace do a preliminary assessment of the shift, accounting for the unexpected.

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

- Use of technological means (telework);
- Installation of physical barriers (full partitions) between different workstations that are too close to each other or that cannot be spaced;
- Organization of work methods. For example:
 - prefer teams that are as small and stable as possible,
 - reduce the number of workers and job rotations,
 - if applicable, do not hold meetings that require a physical gathering,
 - avoid sharing objects,
 - limit outings and trips to those strictly necessary;
- A procedure mask and protective eyewear (protective glasses or visor covering the face down to the chin) are supplied to and worn by personnel who perform a task requiring them to be within 2 metres of another person, in the absence of physical barriers.



Hand hygiene

Frequent hand washing with soap and lukewarm 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, especially:

- before or after touching the face (eyes, nose, mouth);
- after coughing, sneezing or wiping the nose;
- before and after eating;
- after handling something that is frequently touched;
- before putting on and removing protective equipment.



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.



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

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

- Ensure efficient operation and maintenance of the ventilation systems, according to the regulatory requirements for the type of facility and the tasks performed;
- Clean the sanitary facilities at least every shift and disinfect them daily;
- Clean the meal areas before each meal and disinfect them daily. For example:
 - refrigerator door handle,
 - chair backs,
 - microwaves;
- Clean the frequently touched surfaces at least every shift and when they are visibly soiled. For example:
 - tables,
 - counters,
 - doorknobs,
 - faucets,
 - toilets,
 - telephones,
 - computer accessories;
- Clean the tools and equipment used after every shift or when they must be shared;
- Use the appropriate cleaning products or disinfectants (see the manufacturer's recommendations and do not mix cleansers);
- Remove non-essential objects (magazines, newspapers and knickknacks) from the common areas.

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



Work-Related Psychosocial Risks

The COVID-19 context can be a major stress factor, whether for the employer or for the workers, suppliers, subcontractors, partners and clients, due to the upheaval it causes in the different spheres of society. Special attention must therefore be paid to the psychosocial health of personnel.

In the current context, the employer must pay special attention to [cyberharassment](#), especially if part of the team is engaged in telework. It is also important to define expected behaviours and behaviours that are deemed inappropriate, such as incivility, including digital incivility, on the part of anyone in the workplace.

Furthermore, no violence of any kind should be tolerated between individuals (co-workers, superiors, subordinates), even if it originates externally (customers, users, suppliers, subcontractors). Employers are invited to display this information and inform their staff.

Having a healthy work environment is crucial and should be a top priority, especially in the context of a pandemic. Maintaining harmonious relations between the employer, workers and customers is absolutely critical. For example, the employer could **create means of discussion to promote social support**, especially if the tasks are performed by telework. In addition, employers should treat the concerns of their employees with respect. They should encourage employees to inform them of any difficulties they encounter so work–family balance measures can be put in place, if possible.

It is important to quickly identify the people who are most vulnerable to pandemic-related psychosocial risks. There are four categories of signs and symptoms of psychological distress: physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioural. To be significant, these symptoms must be accompanied by a change in habits and behaviours. New hires, reassignments, stress and fatigue related to this unusual situation may require special measures. It is important to direct workers experiencing psychological distress to the employee assistance program (EAP) or other supporting resources.

The implementation of various preventive measures in the work environment and good communication of information will allow the employer to respond to the concerns of each individual and thus reassure the workers and reduce their anxiety.



Legal obligations

Legal obligations with respect to occupational health and safety, for both the employer and for workers, must be applied in the context of COVID-19. They are summarized below.

Employer

The employer has an obligation to protect the health, safety and physical well-being of their workers. *The Act respecting occupational health and safety* (AOHS) stipulates that the employer must take all the necessary measures to do so ([section 51](#)). This includes using methods to identify, correct and control risks.

In the context of COVID-19, the employer must ensure that the usual preventive measures are still appropriate. If not, they must modify them to protect workers against the risk of contamination.

The employer must also inform them about the risks associated with their work, including those associated with COVID-19. They must also provide workers with appropriate training, assistance and supervision so that everyone has the skill and knowledge required to safely perform the work assigned to them.

Worker

Every worker has an obligation to take the necessary measures 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 people in the workplace ([section 49](#) of the AOHS). To do this, they must follow the rules and measures put in place in the context of COVID-19, just as they follow the other rules applied in the workplace. Workers must also participate in identifying and eliminating 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.

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 public health authorities.

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](#).

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