

Workplace Sanitary Standards Guide for
the Higher Education System – COVID-19

OHS is everyone's business!



The purpose of this guide is to support the college and university education system 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 in relation 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 higher education 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 and student community 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 and students, 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 persons with COVID-19 symptoms before they enter the workplace, by means such as:
 - a questionnaire,
 - a self-evaluation by the individuals;

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

- Presence in the educational environment is prohibited for any person (student or staff member) exhibiting symptoms associated with the disease (according to the [government website](#));
- 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 (according to the [government website](#)) in the school environment:

- A student 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;
- Once the person exhibiting symptoms has left the premises, disinfect the rooms, the objects and the surfaces touched by this person with appropriate products and with the required protective equipment.

For more information on the protective equipment required, see the section “Maintenance of hygiene measures for material, tools, equipment and frequently touched surfaces”;

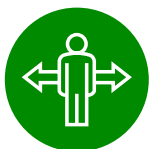
- If a case is suspected (e.g. departure of a person), the people who had contact with this person (e.g. students, colleagues, course lecturers, etc.) must call 1-877-644-4545 to obtain instructions from the Direction générale de la santé publique;

- 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.

Lifting of isolation for a staff member or return to class of a student who exhibited COVID-19 symptoms:

- Generally, the public health authorities (Santé publique) recommend a 10-day exclusion period after the appearance of acute symptoms before returning to the institution.

For more information, see the INSPQ publication on [Mesures pour la gestion des cas et des contacts dans la communauté : recommandations intérimaires](#) (Interim Recommendations for Public Health Management of Cases and Contacts in the Community).



Physical distancing

- Whenever possible, a minimum of 2 metres of distancing between the staff member and the other persons (e.g. colleagues and students) must be maintained at work, from arrival to departure;
- Institutions in the higher education sector organize their teaching activities and client services (e.g. library, service counter) according to the instructions of the Direction générale de la santé publique regarding the number of people authorized for indoor gatherings and the minimum physical distancing parameters;
- This distance must also be maintained during breaks and lunch hour and during meetings between a staff member and a student;
- Students and staff members should cross paths as little as possible, thanks to a reorganization of space and schedules;
- Handshakes and hugs must be avoided;
- The workstations and work methods have been reviewed to comply with 2 metres of physical distancing whenever possible;
- Traffic and interactions between workers is limited;
- 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.);
- The students, suppliers, subcontractors and partners have been informed of the measures implemented in the school environment 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 educational institution as much as possible.

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

In the offices of faculty members and other staff members:

- Review the organization of work to encourage the use of the technological means available whenever possible;

- 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;
- Encourage making appointments with the students to be able to accommodate one student at a time in the offices for consultation or discussion with the teachers or the staff member (compliance with 2-metre distancing between people or wearing protective equipment) and avoid lineups.

At the service counters (e.g. registration, student services):

- Review the organization of work to encourage the use of the technological means available whenever possible;
- Review the processes to encourage online or telephone requests for service and limit face-to-face meetings;
- When present in person and if the tasks require that 2 metres of physical distancing not be maintained, encourage installation of full partitions between the workers and any other person. If this option cannot be considered, wearing protective equipment (such as the procedure mask and protective eyewear) is required;
- For any other activity offered in your institution (for example, libraries or documentation centres, sports facilities, cafeterias, health or dental care), consult [the applicable toolkits](#).



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 leaving the premises;
- 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 and students 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 students 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) regularly or as soon as more than one person uses it;
- Ensure the efficient operation of the mechanical ventilation systems. Maintain and use them according to the regulatory requirements provided for the type of facility. In the case of mechanical ventilation systems, increase the fresh air intake to the maximum during operating hours. For premises with natural ventilation, open the windows, if possible, to trigger fresh air intake;
- Clean and disinfect the sanitary facilities daily or more often, depending on the traffic;
- Clean the staff meal areas after each meal and disinfect them daily. For example:
 - tables,
 - refrigerator door handle,
 - chair backs,
 - microwaves,
 - vending machines;
- Clean and disinfect the frequently touched surfaces with a disinfection product usually used (according to the manufacturer's instructions) every day or more often, depending on the use of the premises and when they are visibly soiled. For example:
 - the rooms (e.g. classrooms, cafeteria, etc.),
 - sanitary facilities,
 - any other relevant location or material;

- After cleaning or disinfection of the surfaces, staff members must remove the protective equipment safely. They will discard the single-use equipment (in a contactless trash can or in reclosable bags or containers reserved for this purpose). They will disinfect the reusable protective equipment with an adapted product;
- 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

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.

Acknowledgments

- Fédération des enseignantes et enseignants de CEGEP
- Fédération des enseignantes et des enseignants du Québec (FNEEQ-CSN)
- Fédération du personnel professionnel des collèges
- Syndicat de professionnelles et professionnels du gouvernement du Québec
- Fédération des employées et employés des services publics
- Fédération du personnel de soutien de l'enseignement supérieur
- Conseil provincial des collèges, Syndicat canadien de la fonction publique
- Confédération des syndicats nationaux
- Fédération québécoise des professeures et professeurs d'université
- Fédération du personnel professionnel des universités et de la recherche
- Conseil provincial du secteur universitaire du SCFP-Québec
- Union étudiante du Québec
- Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec
- Association générale des étudiantes et étudiants de la Faculté de l'éducation permanente (AGEEFEP)
- Fédération des cégeps
- Association des collèges privés du Québec
- Bureau de coopération interuniversitaire



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 de la santé publique (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](#).

Original version in French
Reproduction authorized with 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 978-2-550-87614-4 (PDF)

COVID-19 information line: 1 877 644-4545

To contact a CNESST inspector: 1 844 838-0808