

Workplace Sanitary Standards Guide – COVID-19

OHS is everyone's business!



The purpose of this guide is to support the workplaces for management of OHS in their work environment. 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 analyzing 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 so as to plan a safe resumption 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 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 from an infected person, whether symptomatic or not, when this person coughs or sneezes, for example. They can also be spread by infected 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.

In general, coronaviruses do not survive long on objects. They 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.

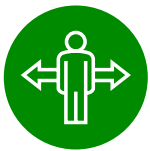
Preventive measures may be applied to reduce the risks of transmission of COVID-19. They are based on the principles of exclusion of symptomatic persons from the workplace, physical distancing, hand washing, respiratory etiquette and maintenance of hygiene measures for the tools, equipment and frequently 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:

- Identification of workers with COVID-19 symptoms before they enter the workplace. For example:
 - a questionnaire,
 - a self-evaluation by the workers;
- Isolation in a room of a worker who starts feeling symptoms in the workplace, wearing a procedure mask and reporting to 1-877-644-4545.



Physical distancing

- Whenever possible, a minimum of 2 metres 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 and hugs must be avoided.

Adjustments that 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 (transparent full partitions) between different workstations when they are too close or 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 rotation,
 - if applicable, do not hold meetings that require a physical gathering,
 - avoid sharing objects,
 - limits outings and trips to those strictly necessary;
- Personal protective equipment adapted to the risk is supplied:
 - respiratory protection,
 - protective glasses or visor,
 - gloves.



Hand washing

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

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



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 survive 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:
 - the 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 customers, 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 the expected behaviours and the behaviours that are deemed inappropriate, such as incivility, including digital incivility and in the work environment, on the part of everyone found there.

Furthermore, any form of violence between individuals (co-workers, hierarchical superiors, subordinates) must not be tolerated, even if it comes from outside the organization (customers, users, suppliers, subcontractors). The employer is invited to post this information and inform the personnel.

The work climate is crucial and, in the specific context of the pandemic, special attention must be paid to keeping it healthy. Harmonious relations among the employer, the workers and the customers are very important. For example, the employer could **create means of discussion to promote social support**, especially if the tasks are performed by telework. Furthermore, the employer is invited to welcome the concerns of the members of its personnel respectfully. The employers should encourage the workers to present them with the problems they may encounter so that they implement family-work reconciliation measures, if possible.

It is important to be able to rapidly detect people who will be more specifically affected by the psychosocial risks of the pandemic. 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 of habits and behaviours. New hires, reassignment of workers, stress and fatigue caused by this unusual situation may necessitate special measures. In case of psychological distress, it is important to direct these persons 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

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.

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 order by the public health authorities.

Acknowledgments

We thank the union and employer partners of the CNESST's Board of Directors:

- Mr. Kaven Bissonnette, Vice-President, Centrale des syndicats démocratiques
- Mr. Benoît Bouchard, Secretary General, Canadian Union of Public Employees
- Mr. Daniel Boyer, President, Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec
- Mr. Alain Croteau, Director – Québec, United Steelworkers
- Mr. Yves-Thomas Dorval, CEO, Conseil du patronat du Québec
- Ms. France Dupéré, employer representative
- Ms. Patricia Jean, Vice-President, Finance, Construction Albert Jean Itée
- Ms. Norma Kozhaya, Vice-President, Research and Chief Economist, Conseil du patronat du Québec
- Mr. Jean Lacharité, Second Vice-President, Confédération des syndicats nationaux
- Ms. Isabelle Leclerc, Principal Vice-President, Human Resources, Sollio Groupe Coopératif
- Mr. Simon Lévesque, Occupational Health and Safety Officer, FTQ-Construction
- Mr. Charles Milliard, CEO, Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec
- Ms. Caroline Senneville, Vice-President, Confédération des syndicats nationaux
- Mr. François Vincent, Vice-President, Canadian Federation of Independent Business

We also thank our principal partners: Direction nationale de la santé publique, Institut de recherche Robert-Sauvé en santé et en sécurité du travail and Institut national de santé publique du Québec.

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 978-2-550-86533-9 (PDF)