

COVID-19: Return to the Workplace (Office) Protocols



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The CGA Health and Safety Committee has developed considerations around how personnel can return to working out of their organization's office(s), when it is appropriate to do so.

The final decision for staff to resume working out of any organization's office(s), versus working remotely and/or in isolation, will be made by the senior management group of that organization in consultation with their Health and Safety and Human Resources professionals and in compliance with all federal, provincial and/or municipal guidance and edicts.

It is also understood that federal, provincial and/or municipal governments will most likely determine the exact timing of any such return, but it is important to have a sense of a go-forward approach to supplement other recommendations or requirements.

The fundamental principles that must always be adhered to regardless of the situation:

- **Keep physical distance:** limit exposure to others as much as possible, maintain 6', 2m, 2 arms' length at a minimum.
- **Clean hands:** wash with soap for 20 seconds, or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- **Do not touch face:** always remember to avoid touching one's face (wearing face masks can help discourage face-touching).
- **Cover:** cough and sneeze into your elbow or a tissue (that is then disposed of), or consider covering your mouth and nose with cloth covering.
- **Clean and disinfect:** ensure frequently touched surfaces are kept clean.
- **Stay home if you feel sick:** workers experiencing any influenza-like symptoms should stay at home.

Any number of points will form the basis of more detailed return to workplace protocols in conjunction with external plans as they arise. Considerations include, but are not limited to:

- The triggers that would initiate consideration for returning to work at a company's offices (as opposed to continuing to work remotely and/or in isolation) will come from federal, provincial and/or municipal edicts and guidance. It is also felt that when the time comes, a legislative body (provincial or municipal) will likely issue guidance and restrictions including some detail around how and when to return to office and the things to do once back at work physically.
- Have in place strict edicts stating that any staff members not feeling well, whether the symptoms of same are COVID-19 related or not, must continue or revert to working from home. Regular reminders of illness-warning symptoms and illness prevention guidelines should be communicated to staff.

- A return to workplaces should be optional (at least initially) to respect those who may still have child-care issues if schools do not restart at the same time, anxiety around mixing in again with the general population, the necessary use by some of public transit, riding in building elevators, care-giver responsibilities, etc.
- Consider what contact-tracing measures may be implemented in order to aid mitigative actions that may be taken to identify and protect colleagues should a given employee fall ill with COVID-19.
- Staggered returns to work by staff should also be considered:
 - Alternating staff by week, i.e. half of the employees work in the office one week, with the other half working in the office the following week.
 - By risk (delaying the return of those with existing maladies, above a certain age, those with higher susceptibility).
 - By preference to return.
 - Ease of crossing interprovincial boundaries; there may be differences in what each provincial jurisdiction is allowing.
 - Not having everyone in the same work team return at the same time.
- Travel restrictions or rules prohibiting non-essential travel should be communicated clearly with all staff, so expectations are understood.
- Regular and frequent communication and reinforcement of illness-prevention workplace rules and protocols should be considered.
- Increase the supply of hand sanitizer in the office and consider supplying face masks and face covers. Post in common workspaces, proper hygiene/coughing etiquette and illness prevention.
- Keep a moratorium on face-to-face meetings even after people do return physically to their offices and continue to practice appropriate physical distancing and hygiene.
- Maintain physical distancing including floor markings to provide visual clues as to safe pathways.
- Consideration must be given to how staff take breaks, including lunch breaks. A staggered approach may be required to allow for physical distancing rules.
- Regular confirmation of employee temperatures for diagnostic purposes will be considered, methodology to be determined.

Organizations should facilitate with their landlord or maintenance/cleaning staff a discussion about more frequent and thorough cleaning of certain key elements of the office. Surfaces in common/shared areas should be part of more frequent cleaning regimens, such as: doorknobs, handles, common-use chairs/tables, hand railings, security systems keypads, elevator buttons, telephones, computers and peripherals, photocopiers/scanners and other business equipment, coffee/beverage dispensers, microwaves, and common kitchen surfaces.

- Adopt a phased approach towards returning to work. For example, the U.S. federal government has adopted the following phased system:
 - **Phase 1:** For jurisdictions that satisfy gating criteria once
 - Individuals:
 - Vulnerable individuals (elderly and those with underlying health conditions) continue to shelter in place
 - All individuals: physical distance, avoid gatherings of more than 10 people
 - Travel: minimize non-essential travel
 - Employers:
 - Encourage telework whenever possible
 - Close common areas or enforce strict physical distancing protocols
 - Minimize non-essential travel
 - Make special accommodations for vulnerable people
 - Specific employers:
 - Schools: remain closed
 - Senior living facilities/hospitals: visits should be prohibited
 - Large venues (sit-down dining, theaters, places of worship): can operate under strict physical distancing protocols
 - Gyms: can open with strict physical distancing/sanitation protocols
 - Bars: should remain closed.
 - **Phase 2:** Jurisdictions that satisfy gating criteria twice
 - Individuals:
 - Vulnerable individuals (elderly and those with underlying health conditions) continue to shelter in place
 - All individuals: physical distance, avoid gatherings of more than 50 people
 - Travel: non-essential travel can resume
 - Employers:
 - Encourage telework whenever possible
 - Close common areas or enforce moderate physical distancing protocols
 - Make special accommodations for vulnerable people
 - Specific employers:
 - Schools: can reopen
 - Senior living facilities/hospitals: visits should be prohibited

- Large venues (sit-down dining, theaters, places of worship): can operate under moderate physical distancing protocols
 - Gyms: may remain open with strict physical distancing/sanitation protocols
 - Bars: may operate with diminished standing-room occupancy.
- **Phase 3:** Jurisdictions that satisfy gating criteria three times
 - Individuals:
 - Vulnerable individuals (elderly and those with underlying health conditions) can resume public interactions but should practice physical distancing and other precautionary measures.
 - All individuals: consider minimizing time spent in crowded environments.
 - Employers:
 - Resume unrestricted staffing of worksites.
 - Specific employers:
 - Senior living facilities/hospitals: visits can resume with practice of diligence regarding hygiene.
 - Large venues (sit-down dining, theaters, places of worship): can operate under limited physical distancing protocols
 - Gyms: can remain open with standard sanitation protocols
 - Bars: may operate with increased standing-room occupancy.

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