

# Offices:

## Protocols for returning to operation

The following content was posted to WorkSafeBC's website on May 22, 2020. For the most current version, please visit [worksafebc.com](https://www.worksafebc.com).

These protocols provide guidance to any employer with office space. These employers may also benefit from reviewing other protocols if their workplace includes other work environments such as [retail services](#), or [food and drink services](#). Employers must also ensure they are abiding by any [orders, notices, or guidance issued by the provincial health officer](#), and the appropriate health authority, which are relevant to their workplace.

### Developing a COVID-19 safety plan

Employers are required to develop a [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#) that outlines the policies, guidelines, and procedures they have put in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. This plan follows the six steps outlined on [COVID-19 and returning to safe operation](#). Employers must involve frontline workers, joint health and safety committees, and supervisors in identifying protocols for their workplace. You do not need a formal plan in place to begin operation, but are expected to develop it while protecting the safety of your workers.

Employers are not required to submit plans to WorkSafeBC for approval, but in accordance with the order of the [Provincial Health Officer](#), this plan **must be posted** at the worksite. During a WorkSafeBC inspection, we will ask employers about the steps they have taken to protect their workers or to see the plan if it has been developed.

One part of developing your COVID-19 Safety Plan is identifying protocols that everyone at the workplace must follow to keep workers safe. We've provided industry-specific protocols below to consider as you develop the plan for your workplace.

These protocols are not a list of requirements; however, they should be considered and implemented to the extent that they address the risks your workplace. You may need to identify and implement additional protocols if the protocols suggested here do not sufficiently address the risk to your workers.

### Understanding the risk

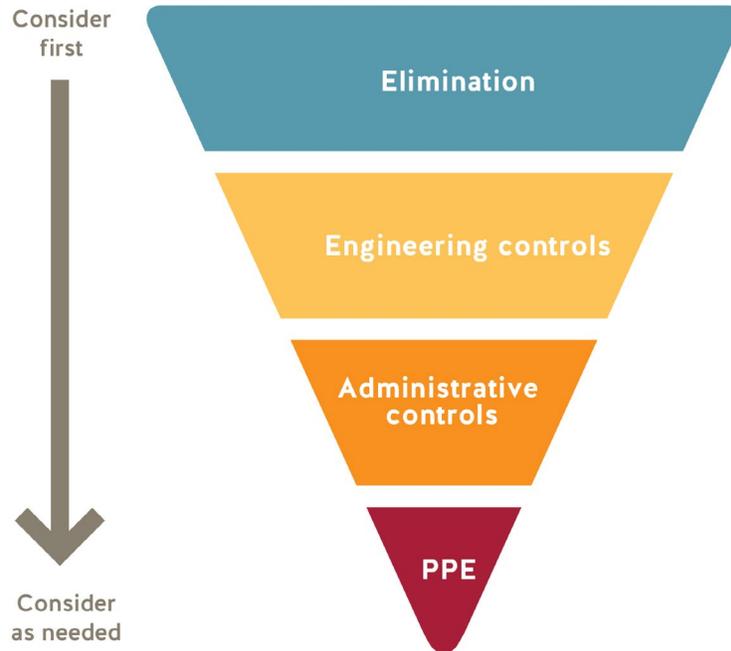
The virus that causes COVID-19 spreads in several ways, including through droplets when a person coughs or sneezes, and from touching a contaminated surface before touching the face. Higher risk situations require adequate protocols to address the risk.

- The risk of person-to-person transmission is increased the closer you come to other people, the amount of time you spend near them, and the number of people you come near. Physical distancing measures help mitigate this risk.
- The risk of surface transmission is increased when many people contact same surface, and when those contacts happen in short intervals of time. Effective cleaning and hygiene practices help

mitigate this risk.

## Selecting protocols for your workplace

Note that different protocols offer different protection. Wherever possible, use the protocols that offer the highest level of protection and add additional protocols as required.



**First level protection (elimination):** Use policies and procedures to keep people at a safe physical distance from one another. Limit the number of people in your workplace at any one time, and implement protocols to keep workers at least 2 metres from other workers, customers, and members of the public.

**Second level protection (engineering controls):** If you can't always maintain physical distancing, install **barriers** such as plexiglass to separate people.

**Third level protection (administrative controls):** Establish rules and guidelines, such as cleaning protocols, telling workers to not share tools, or implementing one-way doors or walkways.

**Fourth level protection (PPE):** If the first three levels of protection aren't enough to control the risk, consider the use of **non-medical masks**. Be aware of the limitation of non-medical masks to protect the wearer from respiratory droplets. Ensure workers are **using masks appropriately**.

## Protocols for offices

### Building access

- Workplaces should stagger start and end times if crowding at entry and exit locations means the physical distancing requirement of at least 2 metres cannot be maintained. Alternatively, consider designating doors for entry and exit to prevent workers and others from coming into proximity with one another.
- Consider providing hand sanitizer available to workers as they enter the building.
- Post signage indicating that employees, contractors, or visitors exhibiting COVID-like symptoms are not allowed to enter the office building.

### Workplace operations

- Where possible, employers should consider remote work options for workers who do not require office attendance.
- Consider alternating and/or adding additional shifts to reduce the risk of exposure and maintain the physical distancing requirement.
- Avoid meetings or gatherings where physical distances cannot be maintained. Consider using larger rooms, moving meetings outside, or having all or some attendees attend virtually.
- Consider creating cohorts of workers who work together and who do not interact with other cohorts. This will assist in reducing transmission throughout the workplace in the event that a staff member becomes ill.
- Consider establishing one-way staircases to minimize worker contact – post signage to indicate direction.

### Workstations

- If office attendance is required, position workers in a location that allows them to put more distance between themselves and their co-workers or customers. Arrange workstations at least 2 metres apart and away from communal pathways.
- Consider making communal pathways one directional to reduce personal interactions.
- If necessary, install effective **barrier** (e.g., plexiglass shields) between workstations.
- Where possible, cancel in-person meetings and hold meetings by teleconference, video conference, or email instead.
- Minimize sharing office space or workstations. If workers must share office space, integrate these locations into your cleaning and hygiene protocols, ensuring that frequently-touched surfaces are addressed such as the computer keyboard and mouse, desk surface, and telephone.

### Communal spaces

- Ensure that whatever changes you make to the usage of communal areas is clearly communicated to workers.
- Consider single-person access if entry into constricted area is required.
- Limit the number of workers allowed in common areas at any one time. Consider staggered break times to reduce large gatherings and encourage workers to take breaks at their own desk or outside. Limit or stagger workers entering change areas or rooms with assigned lockers.
- Encourage workers to eat outside or at their desk.

- Consider distancing the tables in lunch rooms, or installing plexiglass dividers at the tables.
- If breaching the physical distancing requirement is unavoidable, plan the work task and provide instructions to workers to ensure that time spent in close proximity is minimized.
- Restrict eating to a clearly identified and dedicated area with handwashing stations, cleaning and disinfectant supplies, and adequate space to maintain the physical distancing requirement.
- Require workers to bring their own dishes and utensils.
- Refrain from providing and consuming communal foods.
- Allow communal doors to remain open throughout the workday to reduce contact with door handles.
- Instruct workers to use their own equipment, such as pens, staplers, headsets, and computers.
- Minimize the number of people using previously shared office equipment or other items (photocopiers, coffee machines, microwave ovens, etc.). Shared equipment should be cleaned and disinfected after each use.
- Establish **hygiene practices** that address the needs of the workplace that includes the requirement to wash or sanitize hands after coming into contact with public items.

### Outside visitors

- If required, visits to the workplace should be prearranged, staggered, and safety protocols should be communicated before entry into the workplace (e.g., email and/or signage posted to entrance). Keep a record of visitors to the workplace.
- Post signage at the workplace to inform everyone of the measures in place.
- When booking appointments, visitors should be reminded to reschedule if they experience symptoms typical of COVID-19 or are placed on self-isolation.
- Minimize non-essential in-person interaction between workers and visitors (e.g., use of virtual meeting tools, email, or telephone).
- Waiting areas should be arranged to maintain physical distancing requirement. Install **barriers** between receptionists and visitors (e.g., plexiglass). Place markings on the floor directing visitors where to stand when approaching front desk.
- Provide visitor-facing staff with hand sanitizer for their use only.
- Visitors should attend appointments alone and minimize time spent in waiting area before their appointments (e.g., request visitors to wait in vehicles and text message or call when ready).
- Remove non-essential communal items, such as candy, magazines, and complimentary phone chargers.
- Beverages (coffee, tea, water) should not be offered at this time.
- Provide a safe place for visitors to dispose of used sanitizing wipes and other personal protective equipment.

### Deliveries

- Ensure that delivery zones are clearly identified and limited to receivers and deliverers only.
- Arrange for suppliers and/or delivery persons to drop off goods at building entrance to avoid searching for business within the premises.

- Request contactless delivery to maintain physical distancing requirement (e.g., delivery person leaves packages in a pre-arranged location). This option may be limited if signing or proof of receipt is required.

## Transportation

- Non-essential transportation or business travel should be limited and on an exceptional basis only.
- Restrict travel between offices or work locations to critical business functions.
- Minimize the use of shared vehicles. If required, follow appropriate disinfection procedures before and after travel for vehicle surfaces such as the steering wheel, gear shift, and door handles.
- Where possible, communicate using telephone, text message, or other communication technology.

## Elevator use

- Post occupancy limits on elevators.
- Place tape or markings on the ground to indicate where workers should stand while lining up to enter the elevator. Ensure adequate space is provided for those exiting the elevator.
- Ensure elevator panels are routinely disinfected.

## For more information

The information on this page is based on current recommendations and may change. For the latest guidance, please see the health information from the [British Columbia Centre for Disease Control](#) and the latest news from the [government of British Columbia](#).

## If you have a question or concern

Workers and employers with questions or concerns about workplace exposure to COVID-19 can call WorkSafeBC's Prevention Information Line at 604.276.3100 in the Lower Mainland (toll-free within B.C. at 1.888.621.SAFE). You'll be able to speak to a prevention officer to get answers to your questions, and if required, a prevention officer will be assigned to assess the health and safety risk at your workplace.

## Resources

### COVID-19: A guide to reducing the risk

This resource is for employers, outlining the steps to follow to make sure you are minimizing the risk of COVID-19 so your business can operate safely.

### COVID-19 Safety Plan

Employers are required to develop a COVID-19 Safety Plan that outlines the policies, guidelines, and procedures they have put in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. This tool will guide...

### Help prevent the spread of COVID-19: Cover coughs and sneezes

This poster reminds workers and visitors to cover their mouths when they cough or sneeze, and to wash their hands afterward.

[See more resources](#)