

## From COVID-19 Safety Plans to communicable disease prevention

The provincial health officer has issued a [statement](#) advising that beginning in Step 3 of the Restart plan, employers may begin to transition away from posting a copy of a COVID-19 Safety Plan at their workplace towards communicable disease prevention.

To provide employers and workers with a better understanding of workplace requirements to implement communicable disease prevention, we have posted [OHS Guideline G-P2-21 Communicable disease prevention](#) in advance of its effective date of July 1, 2021.

- A communicable disease is an illness caused by an infectious agent or its toxic product that can be transmitted in a workplace from person to person. Examples of communicable diseases that may circulate in a workplace include COVID-19, norovirus, and seasonal influenza.
- Communicable disease prevention focuses on basic risk reduction principles to reduce the risk of workplace transmission of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases. The fundamental components of communicable disease prevention include both ongoing measures to maintain at all times and additional measures to be implemented as advised by Public Health:
  - Ongoing measures — maintain at all times:
    - Implementing policies to support staff who may be sick with a communicable disease (for example, fever and/or chills, recent onset of coughing, diarrhea), so they can avoid being at the workplace
    - Promoting hand hygiene by providing hand hygiene facilities with appropriate supplies and reminding employees through policies and signage to [wash their hands regularly](#) and to use [appropriate hygiene practices](#)
    - Maintaining a [clean environment](#) through routine cleaning processes
    - Ensuring building [ventilation](#) is properly maintained and functioning as designed
    - Supporting employees in receiving vaccinations for vaccine-preventable conditions to the extent that you are able
  - Additional measures — implemented as advised by Public Health:
    - Employers must also be prepared to implement additional prevention measures as required by a medical health officer or the provincial health officer to deal with communicable diseases in their workplace or region, should those be necessary.
- Communicable disease prevention involves understanding the level of risk in your workplace, application of the fundamentals and implementing appropriate measures, communicating policies and protocols to all workers, and updating measures and safeguards as required.

- Employers do not have to write or post plans for communicable disease prevention or have them approved by WorkSafeBC.
- Managing communicable disease at your workplace is part of an effective [Occupational Health and Safety Program](#).

To assist employers in the fundamental components of communicable disease prevention, WorkSafeBC has developed [Communicable disease prevention: A guide for employers](#). This guide describes a four-step process to help employers reduce the risk of communicable disease in their workplace, which involves understanding the level of risk in the workplace, application of the fundamentals and implementing appropriate measures, communicating policies and protocols to all workers, and updating measures and safeguards as required.

- Download [Communicable disease prevention: A guide for employers](#)

## Responding to elevated risk

Although the COVID-19 virus is now being managed primarily through vaccination, like all communicable diseases, it may still circulate. Similarly, the level of risk of certain communicable diseases, including COVID-19, may elevate from time to time or on a seasonal basis. This may occur at a local or regional level or within a workplace. In these cases, employers will be advised by medical health officers or the provincial health officer of the measures they need to take to manage the risk. Employers are required to monitor for communicable disease related information from their regional public health officials and the provincial health officer related to their area and industry, and to follow that guidance and direction should additional measures be necessary in their workplace.

## Additional measures

While the majority of measures implemented at workplaces to manage the COVID-19 pandemic through 2020 and the beginning of 2021 will no longer be required in most workplaces, it's possible that some of the same or similar measures may be required to manage communicable disease transmission in the workplace.

The following COVID-19 protocols are being maintained as reference. Guidance around risk levels and appropriate protocols will be provided by regional public health officials and the provincial health officer.

Please note that these are provided for reference only, and are not required to be maintained or implemented in workplaces unless advised by Public Health.

## Physical distancing

- Reduce the number of people in workplaces and areas of the workplace to help encourage physical distancing. For some workplaces, an occupancy limit of that provides at least 5 square metres of unencumbered floor space per person (workers and patrons) may be a sensible approach for determining maximum occupancy. [Occupancy limits](#) may also be established for certain areas of the workplace, including break rooms, meeting rooms, change rooms, washrooms, and elevators.
- Other measures to support physical distancing include working offsite or remotely, virtual meetings, changes to work schedules, changes to how tasks are done, limiting or prohibiting visitors, and reducing the number of customers.
- Manage the traffic flow in the workplace through directional arrows, unidirectional hallways, and designated exit and entrances.
- Consider creating pods of workers who work together exclusively to minimize the risk of broad transmission in the workplace.
- Considering removing or rearranging furniture in work areas, including kitchens, break rooms, change rooms, and other locations where workers may be close to one another.
- See these resources for employers to support workers working from home:
  - [Working from home: A guide to keeping your workers healthy and safe](#)
  - [Setting up, organizing, and working comfortably in your home workspace](#)

## Barriers

- Barriers can be made of any material that blocks the transmission of air. For many work tasks, barriers need to be transparent. Transparent barriers can be made of plexiglass, acrylic, polycarbonate, or similar materials. Opaque barriers may work for some environments, such as cubicles.
- Barriers must be large enough to create an effective barrier between the breathing zones of the people on each side. A person's breathing zone has a diameter of about 60 cm (24 in.), which means it extends 30 cm (12 in.) in every direction from the person's nose.
- A barrier should be positioned to accommodate the heights of the tallest and shortest people who will likely be near it. If one person is standing and the other is seated, the barrier should extend 30 cm (12 in.) below the seated person's nose and 30 cm (12 in.) above the standing person's nose. Barriers should also be wide enough to account for the normal movement of both people.
- If a barrier needs an opening to pass documents, money, or other materials, the opening should be positioned so that it is out of the breathing zone of both people.
- Barriers should not be designed or installed in such a way that they impede ventilation in the room.

- You must also ensure that:
  - Free-standing barriers are stable so they won't fall and injure anyone.
  - Hanging barriers won't swing, which can waft air from one side of the barrier to the other.
  - The barrier won't hinder a person's escape in case of emergency.
- Barriers must be cleaned regularly to prevent the accumulation and transmission of contaminants. Barriers with openings that people pass materials through should be included in your inventory of commonly touched surfaces and cleaned more frequently. Follow the manufacturers' instructions for both the barrier and the cleaning product used, to ensure they do not damage or degrade the barrier.

### **Barriers in vehicles**

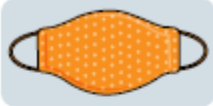


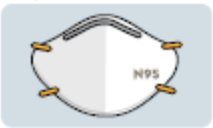
- Barriers should be installed in such a way that the vehicle remains in safe operating condition in accordance with the Motor Vehicle Act Regulations, Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 4.3 and 17.8, and the Passenger Transportation Act as applicable.
- You must also ensure that:
  - The barrier is not mounted rigidly on the vehicle or in any way that might injure someone in the vehicle if there's an accident.
  - The barrier will let the driver and passengers exit the vehicle if their doors become unusable.
  - The barrier doesn't hinder the driver's vision or obstruct the safe operation of the vehicle.

### **Masks for non-health care settings**

Ensure that everyone in the workplace follows these guidelines when wearing a mask:

- Make sure you know how to wear your mask. Follow manufacturer or industry specifications and directions.
- Don't wear masks below the nose or chin. This can increase the risk of exposure.
- Keep your mask clean and dry. If it gets wet, it's less effective at preventing the spread of droplets.
- Change masks as necessary. You may need several masks available as they build up moisture during the day and become less effective. If your mask becomes wet, soiled, or damaged, replace it immediately.
- Make sure you know how to clean your mask. Wash cloth masks every day using the warmest water setting. Store in a clean, dry place to prevent contamination. Disposable masks cannot be laundered.

- Practise good hygiene even if you're wearing a mask. Don't remove your mask to cough or sneeze. After coughing or sneezing, wash your hands. Don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Face shields can be used in the workplace in combination with face masks to provide added protection. They cannot be used to replace face masks or other protective measures.
- A workplace poster is available for the [use and care of masks](#)

Type	Use
<b>Cloth or non-medical masks</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May offer some level of protection by preventing the spread of droplets from the wearer to others around them.</li> <li>• Not a proven method of protection for the wearer because they may not prevent the inhalation of droplets.</li> <li>• May be considered by employers for use by workers or customers as a protective measure when physical distancing is not practical or feasible.</li> <li>• Should never be relied upon as a sole protective measure.</li> </ul>
<b>Medical masks</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medical masks (also known as procedure or surgical masks) are used by health care workers for direct patient care where physical distancing can't be maintained.</li> <li>• May be used in other jobs where there's a risk of exposure to blood or bodily fluids.</li> <li>• When worn properly, can protect the wearer and others around them against droplets.</li> <li>• Are single-use items that are not designed to be cleaned and reused.</li> <li>• There is a variety of certified medical mask types, some of which may be difficult to source because of supply limitations.</li> </ul>
<b>Medical N95 respirators</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used primarily by health care workers where there is significant risk of exposure to very small airborne particles and aerosols.</li> <li>• Offer protection from droplets and splashes.</li> <li>• Most often used during and after aerosol-generating procedures performed on patients infected with COVID-19 or other infectious agents.</li> <li>• Fit closely over the nose and mouth to form a tight seal. Must be fit-tested and worn properly. Subject to the fit-testing requirements of the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Regulation.</li> <li>• Should not be used by non-health care workers.</li> </ul>
<b>Industrial N95 respirators</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used primarily in non-medical settings to protect workers from inhaling dust, fumes, and other hazardous aerosols.</li> <li>• When worn properly, can protect the wearer against droplets. If the respirator has a valve, droplets could be spread through the valve, so may not protect others.</li> <li>• Fit closely over the nose and mouth to form a tight seal. Must be fit-tested and worn properly. Subject to the fit-testing requirements of the OHS Regulation.</li> </ul>

**Enhanced cleaning and disinfecting – Reducing the risk of surface transmission**

- Identify job tasks where there is an exchange of money, credit cards, or hard-surface materials such as pens, clipboards, and keys and determine whether these processes can be changed or modified to reduce the exchange of materials between people.
- Identify the tools, machinery, and equipment that workers share while working. Consider modifying job tasks to reduce sharing of equipment, and also consider implementing processes for cleaning and disinfecting these surfaces between uses.
- Identify surfaces around the workplace that people touch often, such as doorknobs, elevator buttons, and light switches and ensure that these surfaces are included in the cleaning and disinfecting plan at the workplace.
- Implement enhanced cleaning and disinfecting practices as follows:
  - Use regular soap and water or another cleaning solution to clean surfaces. Depending on how many people are in the space and how it's used, you may need to clean some spaces more frequently.
  - There are a number of products you can use for disinfection, including consumer products that don't require a safety data sheet,. However, it's still important to follow whatever safety information is available for the product. Use these products with caution, as directed on the label, to avoid introducing other hazards into your workplace.
  - One of the most common disinfectant solutions is water and bleach. You can make a 500 ppm bleach solution by adding 42 mL (3 tablespoons) of bleach to 4 L (1 gallon) of water. For other quantities, use this [bleach calculator](#). Never mix bleach with other disinfecting products. This this can result in dangerous fumes. For more information, visit the BC Centre for Disease Control's [Cleaning and Disinfecting](#) webpage.
  - Some sanitizing solutions contain up to 70 percent alcohol and will release flammable vapours. Use these with caution, and don't use them if there are ignition sources nearby.
- Ensure that workers tasked with cleaning and disinfecting duties have appropriate training and materials to do the job safely.