

COVID-19

PANDEMIC PLAN

Last updated March 19, 2020

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Due to the evolving nature of a pandemic, information found in this guide is subject to change. For the latest version, please refer to veterans.gc.ca/eng/info-vac-staff-covid-19.

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1. PURPOSE

With the potential onset of COVID-19 pandemic, Veterans Affairs Canada has made it a priority to provide managers with this guide containing updated and readily accessible information to better support employees and to maintain a safe and healthy work environment. This guide will be reviewed and updated as new information and directions become available.

The objective of the guide is to maintain a fair, transparent and consistent approach in the management of human resources issues that may arise as a result of a pandemic. This information provides you, as a manager, with direction on your obligations and responsibilities to employees and helps you:

- minimize workplace disruption and maintain critical government service delivery; and
- provide a healthy and safe environment for your employees.

This guide was originally prepared by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, as a cooperative effort between the Human Resources Services and Integrity branches, with guidance from the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) and Public Safety Canada. It has been adapted for Veterans Affairs Canada.

This document includes practical guidelines, questions and answers, and appendices with other relevant information. A network of regional and national Veterans Affairs Canada employees is working together to ensure a consistent approach is adopted and the best possible directions are provided to managers.

NOTE: This guide provides general guidelines only. Managers are ultimately responsible for ensuring the sound management of their resources.

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Veterans Affairs Canada is committed to ensuring that its employees can perform their duties and provide vital government services to Canadians and partners in a safe and healthy environment in the event of an emergency or disaster.

Its efforts are guided by three principles:

1. ensure health and safety of employees;
2. ensure safety of premises, assets and information; and
3. ensure continuity of an effective operation to meet the needs of Veterans and its other clients.

3. OVERALL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 Government of Canada

The first notification of an international health emergency will come from the World Health Organization. In this country, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) monitors the international and domestic situation and, if appropriate, declares a national health emergency. PHAC is the GOC lead in minimizing serious illness and death.

Public Safety Canada, the lead in minimizing societal disruption during a widespread health emergency, coordinates its Government Operations Centre (GOC) with assistance from primary and supporting departments. PHAC will also activate its *Health Emergency Communications Plan* to ensure GOC messaging is consistent..

3.2 Veterans Affairs Canada

Under the Policy on Government Security (PGS), VAC is responsible for establishing a Business Continuity Management (BCM) program to provide for the continued availability of critical/essential programs and/or services. A health emergency will prompt the Department to activate one or more of its business continuity plans (BCPs).

VAC must plan for health emergencies from two standpoints: as an employer and as a service provider. Thus, the Department must consider the following three groups while planning for health emergencies:

- Veterans living in long-term care facilities across the country;
- Veterans living throughout Canada and around the world, especially the elderly; and
- Staff in offices across the country.

3.3 Senior Management

In exceptional circumstances, senior management, up to and including the Deputy Minister (DM), may be required to authorize expenditures or actions to meet requirements of the Departmental mandate.

3.4 Local Command Teams and Incident Management Team

In the event of a disruption at VAC, from either a widespread or local health emergency, local office command teams will manage the response for their respective office or unit. If the required response exceeds local capacity or affects multiple locations, the Department's incident management team (IMT) will provide support and coordinate the response, based on organizational needs and direction from senior management. The initial goal is a minimal level of service while working toward the eventual return to normal operations. The IMT will work with local command teams to

implement strategies and will update senior management on the impacts to Departmental staff and services.

4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MANAGEMENT

During a pandemic, you are responsible for providing your employees with a healthy and safe work environment at all times. To do so, you need to be aware of national directions and Department guidance to manage the situation and keep employees informed of actions being taken to keep them safe in the workplace.

Specifically, you are responsible for:

- keeping informed of Veterans Affairs Canada operational guidance, directions and communications;
- informing employees of these directions and guidance;
- ensuring that your employees understand their responsibility for protecting themselves, including understanding the early symptoms of COVID-19 and staying home when they show symptoms;
- communicating regularly with the team;
- ensuring that fact sheets and signs on handwashing and on other preventive measures are posted in the workplace;
- ensuring that your business continuity plan and related annexes are maintained and shared with those employees who will be required to respond to the situation;
- ensuring that the security screening of individuals with access to government information and assets is reliable and trustworthy; and
- supporting employees who are experiencing stress in the workplace.

Additional information can be found in the appendices.

4.1 Privacy and Protection of Personal Information

During a pandemic, you are responsible for protecting your employees' personal or medical information. If an employee advises you that he or she has contracted COVID-19, you must not share personal or medical information about the employee, unless authorized to do so by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC).

Q1. If an employee calls in sick, advising that they have been diagnosed with COVID-19, what are my obligations as a manager to ensure his or her privacy, while balancing the well-being of the rest of my team?

You must protect the employee's personal or medical information and must not share specific information about the employee, unless authorized to do so by PHAC.

The well-being of other employees is best protected by regular reminders of the key principles of reducing their chances of infection through the tips listed on <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks.html#p>

Invite all employees to raise issues or concerns with you, while signalling that you will protect their personal information as well as that of their co-workers.

4.2 Labour Relations

4.2.1 Mobility of Staff/Change of Workplace (Frequently Asked Questions)

In accordance with Treasury Board policy, in the event of an emergency, you may require employees to perform tasks outside their regular duties. You may also require employees to work outside their usual office or geographical area.

You have the right to assign duties as you deem necessary. Every step should be taken, however, to ensure that employees who are being asked to perform a task are:

- properly trained to perform the assigned duties;
- delegated appropriate authority;
- provided with the appropriate personal protective equipment (if applicable);
- not being put at undue risk;
- maintaining their current salary level if the reassigned duties are at a lower classification level; and
- adequately compensated if the reassigned duties are at a higher classification.

Q2. Can I ask an employee to perform his or her duties in a different work location?

Yes, managers have the authority to ask an employee to work from an alternate office location. If applicable, the employee will be covered by the provisions of the [National Joint Council Travel Directive](#) concerning workplace change.

Q3. If an employee is asked to report to another work location within his or her headquarters area (within 16 km of workplace), will the Department pay for parking?

The time period between the notification and the workplace change will determine the travel expenses that will be reimbursable:

- For a period of less than 30 calendar days, the employee is considered on travel status and subject to full reimbursement of additional travel expenses incurred.
- For a period of more than 30 calendar days, the employee is considered on travel status and subject to full reimbursement of additional expenses incurred for a maximum of 60 calendar days only if the employee is not notified in writing at least 30 calendar days in advance.

For further information, managers and employees may refer to the [National Joint Council Travel Directive](#), specifically travel modules 1 to 3 under Part III.

Q4. If an employee has been asked to report to another building, will the Department provide the transportation or pay for travel to this new location?

If an employee has been asked to work from another building within their headquarters area (within 16 km of workplace), Section 1.9.3, Workplace Change, of the [National Joint Council Travel Directive](#) applies:

1.9.3 When conditions under workplace change outlined [in section 1.9.2], **are not met**, transportation shall be provided to the temporary workplace, or the kilometric rate paid for the distance between the home and the temporary workplace, or between the permanent workplace and the temporary workplace, whichever is less. [emphasis added]

4.2.2 Acting Pay

Most work descriptions expect a certain percentage of work to be performed under other related duties. Such work would be considered to be at the same level as the employee's substantive level. Managers are encouraged to discuss this aspect with their employees and seek advice from their HR advisor if needed.

Employees who are requested to perform the duties of a higher level than their substantive position will be remunerated at the higher level of pay for the duration and in accordance with the terms of their collective agreement.

Employees required to perform duties of a lower level than their substantive position will continue to receive their regular salary for the duration of the pandemic.

4.2.3 Hours of Work

You have the right to assign hours of work as established in the provisions of the appropriate collective agreement. In addition, you are responsible for ensuring that employees are not put at any additional risk as a result of a change in their work schedule.

4.2.4 Overtime

You have the authority to request employees to work overtime due to operational requirements. In such circumstances, options such as voluntary overtime or standby status should be considered first. Should an employee be required or volunteer to work additional hours, the appropriate provisions of their collective agreement or their terms and conditions of employment would apply.

4.2.5 Office Closure

In accordance with Treasury Board policy, in the event that a Veterans Affairs Canada office temporarily closes because of a pandemic, all affected employees (including casuals and students) must continue to be paid for their regularly scheduled hours of work during the period of these office closures. Employees in acting appointments at the time of the office closures continue to be paid at their acting level.

In the event of a temporary office closure, you should advise employees to keep you apprised on how to contact them because you may need to discuss alternative working arrangements (e.g., work off-site, work at home).

Employees are not required to submit leave for periods where management has suspended normal business operations. Rather, they are deemed to be on time off with pay.

Q5. As a manager, if I instruct an employee not to report to work because of an office closure, does the employee have to submit leave?

No. Employees are not required to submit leave for periods where management has suspended normal business operations. For the purpose of leave because of an office closure, employee is defined as indeterminate employees, employees hired on a term basis, casual employees and students. Contractors are not considered employees for this purpose.

Q6. If employees use the daycare that is in a government building that is closed, will the Department reimburse daycare costs?

Daycare costs will not be reimbursed; the employer is not responsible for any costs associated with daycare. In addition, employees are responsible for making alternative daycare arrangements in the event of a pandemic.

4.2.6 Flexible Work Arrangements

In accordance with Treasury Board policy, decisions concerning alternative work arrangements should be made according to and be compatible with the Departmental business continuity plan and telework guidelines (at the regional or national levels) as well as the relevant collective agreements.

Employees are encouraged to use telework and alternative work arrangements as operational requirements and circumstances permit. The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Shared Services Canada and departmental Chief Information Officers have been working together to maximize internet bandwidth to support remote work and prioritize network access tied to critical operations.

To help our workforce maximize productivity individually and collectively, please:

- Use mobile devices whenever possible to send and receive emails;
- Connect to VPN/SRA get what you need from the corporate network and disconnect, which allows for others to do the same;
- Limit the use of video conferencing on the GC network when audio conferencing will suffice;
- Localize any files before leaving the office; and
- Download documents outside normal business hours.

Further, tips to maximize collaboration within and across teams, include:

- Use public cloud services to collaborate with colleagues, for Unclassified work (examples: Facetime, MS Teams, Google HangOuts, Slack, etc.); and
- Use the BBMe application to communicate with colleagues, for up to Protected B work.

Managers and employees are responsible for ensuring that the operational needs of the organization are met.

The terms and conditions and the details of a telework arrangement with an employee must be recorded in writing. Veteran Affairs Canada guidelines on telework can be consulted at http://intranet.vac-acc.gc.ca/pdf/hr/telepol_e.pdf.

If you require further information or assistance, please contact your IT Service Desk:

- IT Self-service Portal
- Skype Chat at IT Service Desk
- TTY at 1-833-921-0072
- Call us at 1-800-268-8898

Q7. If an employee wants to work from home to avoid getting sick, can I approve this?

Unless advised by health authorities or the Treasury Board that telework arrangements **must** be approved, normal business practices are to be followed. As a result, you must review and approve any telework request in accordance with Departmental policies and guidelines and your business continuity plan.

Q8. Can employees work on sensitive, protected or classified information from home?

Employees have to safeguard personal and sensitive information outside the workplace. You should assist employees on the aspects of safe custody and control of sensitive information and make the necessary arrangements for employees to meet their obligations when working away from the designated workplace.

For further information, contact your security officer or HR advisor.

4.3 Leave

Before authorizing any type of leave, you must ensure you have the required delegated authority. You can consult the HR delegation instrument at <http://intranet.vac-acc.gc.ca/eng/human-resources/staffing-recruitment/delegation-staffing-authorities>.

4.3.1 Leave Provisions

All leave situations should be dealt with in a fair and consistent manner. Employees personally affected by a pandemic must communicate with you to review both their individual circumstances and the reasons preventing them from reporting for work as well as to seek your approval for the leave.

An employee can ask you to approve leave in accordance with the provisions set out in his or her collective agreement and the Treasury Board *Directive on Terms and Conditions of Employment* for all types of leave, including sick leave with pay, leave with or without pay for family-related responsibilities, vacation, or other leave with or without pay.

4.3.1.1 Leave Due to Illness

In a pandemic situation, physicians may be overwhelmed and therefore may not be available to provide return-to-work medical certificates. In this case, you should consult with your employee to determine a time frame for returning to work based on information provided by PHAC on the contagious stages of the virus.

Discretion in requesting medical certificates should be exercised when you suspect abuse of sick leave or in a duty-to-accommodate situation.

Employees that are required by public health officials to self-isolate: If in good health and able to work, employees will be asked to discuss with their managers the option to telework. If that is not possible, the employees will be granted "other leave with pay (699 code)" as per their collective agreements.

Paid leave should only be provided to students, casuals and terms of less than three months whose work is determined by a schedule, and who are required to be absent for hours they otherwise would have worked. In no circumstance should paid leave be extended beyond the term of employment. Employees in these categories whose first day of work commenced on or after March 18, 2020 are not expected to be eligible for paid leave. This guidance will remain in effect until April 10, 2020, at which time it will be reassessed.

You must consult your Labour Relations Advisor with regard to any circumstances that are not covered here.

Q9. What do I do if an employee who is at work and not exhibiting signs of COVID-19 expresses concern for their health and safety?

Employees who are not exhibiting signs of COVID-19 are expected to report to work. Reiterate that the Department is keeping informed of measures to ensure that the workplace is healthy and safe and that the steps recommended by the [Public Health Agency of Canada](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/frequently-asked-questions.html) to prevent the spread of illness have been shared with all employees.

You should refer employees to <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/frequently-asked-questions.html> for more information and also remind them about the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counselling services available to them, if required, at.

Q10. What type of leave should an employee take if they call to advise that they have become ill with COVID-19 or are showing flu-like symptoms?

Employees will be advised to stay home and that upon their return to work they will be required to submit a request for sick leave with pay for their absence. You should follow up with the employee to inquire about their recovery and confirm their scheduled return to work date.

Q11. What should I do if an employee reports for work and shows flu-like symptoms?

Treasury Board recommends that:

- the employee leave the workplace and consult a health professional;
- the employee avoid public transportation when leaving the workplace;
- managers and supervisors be informed that the employee has left the workplace; and
- the employee's workstation be cleaned and disinfected.

It is not necessary to inform the other employees that a co-worker has been diagnosed as having COVID-19. Rather, you should help reduce the spread of COVID-19 by reminding employees about the facts concerning this illness and to practice good hygiene.

Q12. What should be done if an employee does not have enough hours in their sick leave credits and they contract COVID-19?

In any difficult situation, managers will support their employees; the same applies during a pandemic. In accordance with most collective agreements, you have discretion to advance sick leave credits to an employee.

Employees may also request other appropriate paid leave (e.g., vacation, personal day) in accordance with their relevant collective agreement. You should use reasonable discretion in approving other leave without pay for reasons of illness. Other leave with pay is not an option in this situation.

Q13. Will employees be permitted to take time off to get vaccinated?

Generally, clinics have convenient hours and employees wishing to be vaccinated are encouraged to do so after work hours. However, if time away from work is required, departments should consider such time as a "periodic medical appointment", which would therefore not be charged against an employee's sick leave bank.

4.3.1.2 Leave to Care for a Family Member

Q14. What type of leave should an employee use to take time off to provide care for a family member who is ill?

Employees may request leave with pay for family-related responsibilities or leave without pay for the care of immediate family. The employee must discuss this request with you as some of these types of leave must be approved in advance.

Other leave with or without pay may be requested by the employee, such as vacation and personal days, and you must consider the request in accordance with the provisions of the employee's collective agreement.

Q15. What type of leave are employees entitled to in the event of a daycare or school closure?

Employees whose children cannot attend school or daycare due to a closure or because of attendance restrictions in place in relation to the coronavirus situation will attempt to make alternative care arrangements. If that is not possible, they discuss with their managers, the option to telework. If that is not possible, they may request leave with pay for family-related responsibilities as per their collective agreement and be granted “other leave with pay” (699 code).

4.3.1.3 Vacation Leave

Q16. I approved vacation leave for an employee and the office was subsequently closed (or operations were suspended). Does the employee still have to use up vacation days?

Yes. If an employee's annual leave was previously approved before the building closed down, he or she had already planned on not reporting for work during that time. The employee's leave, therefore, would not be affected by the office closure. This approach applies to any pre-approved leave.

4.3.1.4 Volunteer Work

A significant number of people provide services to the public on a voluntary basis through community-based service organizations outside the federal public service. During a pandemic, employees may ask for time off to provide volunteer services. In accordance with Treasury Board policy, employees in this situation should be on an authorized leave, either with or without pay, as provided for in their collective agreement.

You must ensure that the employees are:

- excused from their regular work;
- on authorized leave; and
- aware that they are not performing their volunteer functions on behalf of Veterans Affairs Canada.

Employees should be directed to the [VAC Compensation Team](#) for information on the effect this type of leave may have on their benefits and insurance coverage.

4.3.2 Cancellation of Leave

Q17. If leave has already been approved, can it be cancelled?

Management has the authority to cancel leave due to operational requirements. In a pandemic, you must give all other options due consideration before making a decision to cancel annual leave. There are provisions in most collective agreements that the employer may be liable for expenses incurred if annual leave is cancelled. Any portion of annual leave not taken is returned to

the employee's leave bank. It is recommended that you consult with your Labour Relations Advisor on a case-by-case basis.

4.4 Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)

As a manager, you have considerable responsibilities for ensuring the health and safety of employees. Under the *Canada Labour Code, Part II*, you must comply with a list of specific duties. In the context of a pandemic, you are responsible for:

- ensuring that employees are **aware of** known or foreseeable hazards and what measures are in place to reduce or eliminate the hazard;
- familiarizing yourself with your responsibilities in dealing with an employee's right to refuse dangerous work or an occupational health and safety complaint; and
- ensuring that your employees are aware of their right to refuse dangerous work or make an occupational health and safety complaint.

You can obtain advice from the Department's Occupational Health and Safety team regarding health and safety processes and procedures. These processes are set out in the [Canada Labour Code](#) and are explained on VAC@Work at <http://intranet.vac-acc.gc.ca/eng/workplace-services/health-safety/policies/health-safety-policy>.

4.4.1 Refusal to Work/Health and Safety Complaints

In the event of a pandemic, you need to know the steps involved in dealing with refusal to work or complaints regarding Departmental policies and procedures. Employees may refuse to work because of a perceived workplace hazard that they may or may not have been made aware of and believe poses a danger to them and may complain of broader circumstances. The employee **must be at work** to exercise the right to refuse to work.

You and the employee who refuses work or makes an OHS complaint must attempt to resolve the matter internally. An OHS Committee member or health and safety representative may need to be involved in the resolution. Contact your OHS team for advice on managing such a situation.

If a refusal to work or OHS complaint cannot be resolved internally, the Labour Program of Employment and Social Development Canada must be informed. In such situations, a health and safety officer from the ESDC Labour Program will investigate and issue a decision.

Under the Canada Labour Code, managers always have a responsibility to inform the local workplace health and safety committee of any refusals to work, whether or not the situation is resolved internally. In the case of a pandemic, Central Agencies have requested that refusals to work related to COVID-19 be declared. Therefore, in addition to informing the local workplace health and safety committee, the manager will need to report the refusal to work to the manager of the Department's Occupational Health and Safety Program.

4.4.1.1 Pregnant and Nursing Workers

Under the [Canada Labour Code](#), pregnant and nursing workers who believe their job creates a risk for themselves, their fetus or their nursing child have the right to cease to work and continue to receive pay while they seek a medical opinion. If the risk is confirmed by a doctor, the pregnant or nursing worker is entitled to a re-assignment to another position or to modification of her job. This duty to accommodate is also set out in the *Canadian Human Rights Act*. When reassignment or job modification is not feasible, the employee is entitled to unpaid leave during which time she may be entitled to receive Employment Insurance benefits. These withdrawal provisions are applicable to all federally regulated employees across Canada. Determination of potential health and safety risks are assessed on a case-by-case basis.

The ESDC Labour Program can provide information on refusals to work in the workplaces of all federally regulated employers. The request is made through your regional health and safety officer.

Q18. Do employees have the right to refuse to work for health and safety reasons?

Under the [Canada Labour Code](#), employees have the right to refuse to do a job if there is reasonable cause to believe any of the following presents or constitutes a danger to him- or herself or a co-worker:

- a condition at work;
- the use or operation of a machine or thing; or
- the performance of an activity;

Employees **must be at work** to legitimately refuse to work and must follow the proper procedures as follows:

- The employee must notify you without delay of the refusal to work and explain the circumstances. The refusal to work cannot be exercised if it will put another person directly in danger or if it is a normal condition of employment.
- If, **after** consulting with you, an employee still feels that his or her health and safety is at risk, the employee may continue the refusal and concurrently inform you and the workplace health and safety committee or representative without delay. The workplace parties will investigate the refusal to work.
- Afterwards, if you dispute the matter or have taken steps to protect employees and the employee has reasonable cause to believe that the danger continues, you must contact an ESDC Labour Program health and safety officer to investigate the continued refusal to work.

Q19. Can an employee refuse to do work that is outside his or her work description?

In the event of a pandemic, you may require employees to perform a combination of tasks other than normal day-to-day duties that they have not been previously called upon to perform or to perform duties in another geographical location (city or office). Employees cannot refuse to perform these duties simply because they fall outside their work description. See subsection 5.1, Mobility of Staff, for further information.

Work refusals are to be treated on a case-by-case basis, following the steps outlined in the answer to Q18.

Q20. Can an employee refuse to serve a client whom they believe is sick?

Normally, we do not refuse service to clients. In a pandemic, however, you must provide your employees with direction on appropriate measures to protect their health and to stop the spread of disease in accordance with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC).

Under these circumstances, a decision may be taken that sick clients be directed to other channels (Internet, telephone, mail), as appropriate. If such a decision is made, you must keep your staff informed of the appropriate procedures to do this. Your business continuity plans must outline protocols to address disruptions of services in a pandemic.

You must let your employees know that they should approach you at any time when they feel that their health and safety are at risk.

Q21. What do I do if I receive an OHS complaint related to COVID-19?

An employee who believes that there has been a contravention of the Canada Labour Code, Part II, or that there is likely to be an accident or injury to their health arising out of, linked with, or occurring in the course of employment, has the right to make a complaint.

You should attempt to resolve the matter by speaking with the employee. If you and the employee are not able to resolve the matter, an investigation involving a health and safety committee member or health and safety representative is required.

If the parties are unable to resolve the complaint internally, an ESDC Labour Program health and safety officer will need to be contacted to investigate the complaint.

You should involve your Occupational Health and Safety team at the onset of receiving a complaint.

Q22. Will employees be expected to complete an injury compensation form as a result of becoming ill with COVID-19?

No, employees are not required to complete an injury compensation form.

4.4.2 Prevention Measures and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

During a pandemic, Veterans Affairs Canada supports the promotion of good prevention practices that can help reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and other viruses. Veterans Affairs Canada is providing hand sanitizers in all workplaces.

PHAC and Health Canada continue to be the authorities for advice relating to issues such as the appropriateness of issuing PPE (masks, gloves or goggles). Because, at the present time, PHAC and Health Canada have not deemed it necessary, VAC will not be providing PPE to employees.

According to PHAC, evidence demonstrates that:

- if you are a healthy individual, the use of a mask is not necessary
- wearing of masks is **not effective** in preventing transmission of COVID-19;
- if you are experiencing symptoms of an illness that spreads through the air, wearing a mask can help prevent the spread of the infection to others.
- If you are caring for a sick person or you are in direct contact with an ill person, wearing a mask can help protect you from catching COVID-19, but it will not fully eliminate the risk of illness.
- people often use masks incorrectly, or contaminate them when putting them on and taking them off, which could actually increase the risk of infection.

If Veterans Affairs Canada, acting on the advice of PHAC and Health Canada, determines that masks, gloves or goggles are to be provided to its employees during a pandemic, you will be advised accordingly and be responsible for distributing personal protective equipment to your employees and for providing the applicable training.

In a situation where an ill employee must go out into the community (e.g., to seek medical care), PHAC recommends taking measures to avoid exposing others to the virus, such as coughing or sneezing into a disposable tissue or sleeve, and avoiding crowds (such as mass transit). A face mask should then be worn, if available, to reduce the risk of spreading the virus within the community.

Q23. What is PHAC's position on using masks and gloves to avoid catching a COVID-19 virus?

At this time, PHAC does not recommend that members of the general public wear surgical masks to protect against contracting the COVID-19 virus. The evidence shows that this is not effective in preventing transmission of COVID-19 in the general public. For more information, visit the [Public Health Agency of Canada](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/covid-19) website.

Q24. Will Veterans Affairs Canada employees be receiving a mask and gloves?

PHAC has determined that masks and gloves are not required for normal interactions with individuals without symptoms. Therefore, Veterans Affairs Canada will not be distributing masks or gloves to its employees.

You should encourage and remind employees of the following preventive measures recommended by PHAC:

- washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds;
- avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands;
- avoiding close contact with people who are sick;
- coughing or sneezing into your sleeve and not your hands;
- staying home if you are sick to avoid spreading illness to others; and

- check the [Public Health Agency of Canada](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/) website for more information.

4.4.3 Vaccinations

PHAC has the lead role at the federal level for pandemic planning and response. In this respect, PHAC collaborates with provincial, territorial and local public health authorities on surveillance, vaccination programs, the use of antivirals, and other public health measures and communications. Health Canada will advise the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) on public health-related matters that may occur during a pandemic.

Q25. Will Veterans Affairs Canada be organizing flu clinics?

Veterans Affairs Canada continues to consult with TBS on the pandemic issue. There is currently no vaccine for COVID-19. Employees can direct their inquiries regarding pandemic vaccinations to their local public health services.

4.4.4 Transportation of an Employee who Becomes Sick

In accordance with Treasury Board policy, first aid must be promptly dispensed to an employee for an injury, an occupational disease or an illness. As a manager, you must ensure that a sufficient number of employees are available to provide first aid. If further medical attention is required, the employee will be referred to a medical treatment facility, in which case VAC is responsible for the transportation costs.

Q26. Is the manager or supervisor obligated to pay for transportation of an employee who becomes sick at work?

Yes. In accordance with Treasury Board policy, any ambulance or other transportation costs will be covered by the Department. In addition, you must consider alternative methods of transportation (e.g., taxi, family member, co-worker) for non-medical emergencies to ensure that an employee is provided with safe means of transportation, knowing that the employee is in no condition to drive home alone or to take public transportation safely.

4.4.5 Access to Workplace/Risk to Employees

In accordance with Treasury Board policy, you must exercise all reasonable precautionary measures to ensure the health and safety at work of every employee during a pandemic. In a pandemic, if an employee is showing signs of the flu and may be contagious, you must act on

it to ensure that other employees are protected from the contagious individual. Please refer to Appendix D for guidance.

Q27. What should be done if an employee comes to work or is at work and is showing flu-like symptoms?

If the employee is in the workplace and is exhibiting flu-like symptoms, you should direct the employee to go home and to seek medical attention, if required. Employees will be required to use their paid sick leave.

You must advise the employee to keep in regular contact with you during their absence, in accordance with established office practices. Employees must not return to work until they are no longer exhibiting flu-like symptoms or before a return date as identified by a medical practitioner (if applicable).

Q28. What should I do if the employee who is exhibiting flu-like symptoms, consistent with COVID-19, refuses to leave the office?

The responsibility to ensure the health and safety of all employees is a **shared responsibility** and does not lie solely on the manager. As set out in the [Canada Labour Code](#), employees also have a responsibility to take reasonable and necessary precautions to safeguard other employees.

In such a situation, you should explain the obligation on behalf of yourself and the employee to protect all employees and that leaving the workplace is the best approach given the possible risk of spreading the virus. If the employee insists on remaining in the workplace, advise them that their action may be insubordinate and disciplinary action may be taken.

4.4.6 Duty to Accommodate/Higher Risk Employees

As a manager, you should be proactive in encouraging an employee to self-identify, in preparation for a pandemic, if he or she is at a higher risk than normal during a pandemic. Elevated risk could be due to a predisposed medical condition or an identified condition, such as pregnancy.

Employees may be required to provide a medical certificate to attest to the higher than normal risk and to clarify the type of accommodation that would be most effective. Measures to accommodate the employee must be considered for the duration of the pandemic.

Q29. What should I do if an employee comes to me saying he or she is at a higher risk than normal during a pandemic due to a predisposed medical condition, an immune deficiency or an identified condition, such as pregnancy?

You should follow this five-step process for identifying the employee's limitations and possible solutions:

1. Assess the employee's risk and accommodate when necessary

- Request that the employee consult his or her family doctor or a qualified health professional if they do not know the extent of their risk or ways to reduce risk; and
- Discuss, with the employee, the preventive practices set out in this guide.

2. Gather relevant information and assess solutions

- If necessary, request additional information such as a medical note.

Note: Before any decisions are made, relevant information must be acquired to ensure that the most appropriate accommodations under the circumstances are provided.

3. Make an informed decision

Now that the situation has been defined and assessed, a decision must be made based on the criteria and boundaries identified in Steps 1 and 2.

- Respond immediately by implementing ways to reduce the risk; e.g., alternative work arrangements to reduce the amount of contact the employee has with other employees.

4. Communicate the decision

- Identify any implications or issues that may affect the employee's team or work area; and
- Discuss with the employee the most appropriate mechanism to communicate, for example, the employee's alternative work arrangement.

5. Follow up and keep records

- Follow up on a regular basis to ensure the accommodation meets the needs and modify, if necessary;
- Document accommodations and provide relevant information only to those involved in the accommodation to respect the employee's privacy and confidentiality; and
- Keep accommodation documents, including recommendations from physicians, confidential and separate from personnel files.

4.5. Employee Assistance Program

The effects of a pandemic may cause employees additional stress. This stress may manifest itself immediately or be delayed. Physical or psychological symptoms may appear and normal coping capabilities may be affected until the problem is recognized and resolved.

To support your employees who may experience psychological distress at the workplace as a result of a pandemic, you should familiarize yourself with signs and symptoms related to stress and stress management techniques ([Appendix D](#)). In addition, if employees are experiencing psychological distress, you should remind them about the EAP counselling services available to them at 1-800-268-7708 (24/7) or 1-800-567-5803 (TDD).

Q30. How do I address the high level of anxiety that some employees may be experiencing?

In a pandemic, it is natural to experience anxiety, and your employees may wish to speak with you about that. As a manager, you should ensure that your staff are aware of the EAP short-term and crisis counselling services available to them at 1-800-268-7708 (24/7) or 1-800-567-5803 (TDD).

4.6. Staffing

You are responsible for ensuring there is enough staff to cover vital services during a pandemic. In accordance with Treasury Board policy, under the *Public Service Employment Act*, several options exist to facilitate the speedy staffing of positions in response to an emergency. The following options are available to you: exclusion approval order, casual appointments, external non-advertised appointment, internal acting assignments and secondments, temporary hiring and contracting.

You should contact your HR Advisor for advice and guidance.

5. COMMUNICATIONS

The Communications Division will use the Department's internet and social media sites to provide basic or specific emergency information and, when appropriate, redirect users to additional information from official sources (Environment Canada, PEI Emergency Measures Organization, Red Cross, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Public Health).

For communications to staff, Communications will use a variety of tools including: face-to-face meetings, email messages to staff, VAC@Work and FAQs.

6. VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA RESOURCE PEOPLE

Area/Function	Contact	Telephone	Email
Human Resources			
Resourcing			
Director, Client Services	Rachel Steele	902-566-8770	rachel.steele@canada.ca
Compensation			
Director, HR Management Systems and Pay Transformation	Carol Comeau	902-566-8373	carol.comeau@canada.ca
Labour Relations			
Director	Mai Khoi Ta Kim	514-824-5527	maikhoi.takim@canada.ca
Senior Advisor, Policy and Programs	Joseph Szulga	705-568-4128	joseph.szulga@canada.ca
Occupational Health and Safety			
	Tracey Drover	902-314-3852	tracey.drover@canada.ca
National Program Manager, Safety & Emergency Management	Sheila Bolger	902-314-0672	sheila.bolger@canada.ca
Program Operations Assistant	Michelle Duffy	782-377-0313	michelle.duffy@canada.ca
Business Continuity and Security Services			
Business Continuity Coordinator	Tracey Drover	902-314-3852	tracey.drover@canada.ca

APPENDIX A: Due Diligence/Risk Management Requirements

(Canada Labour Code (CLC), Part II)
<http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/showtdm/cs/L-2//20090901>

ITEMS		RISK MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS	LEGISLATIVE REFERENCES
		Note: "Prescribed" means prescribed by the <i>Canada Occupational Health and Safety Regulations</i>	
1.	Duties of Employers	▪ Ensure that the health and safety at work of every person employed by the employer is protected.	CLC 124
		▪ Provide every person granted access to the work place by the employer with prescribed safety materials, equipment, devices and clothing.	CLC 125(1)(l)
		▪ Provide, in the prescribed manner, each employee with the information, instruction, training and supervision necessary to ensure their health and safety at work.	CLC 125(1)(q)
		▪ Ensure that each employee is made aware of every known or foreseeable health or safety hazard in the area where the employee works.	CLC 125(1)(s)
		▪ Ensure that every person granted access to the work place by the employer is familiar with and uses in the prescribed circumstances and manner all prescribed safety materials, equipment, devices and clothing.	CLC 125(1)(w)
		▪ Ensure that the activities of every person granted access to the work place do not endanger the health and safety of employees.	CLC 125(1)(y)
		▪ Develop, implement and monitor a prescribed program for the prevention of hazards in the work place and provide for the education of employees in health and safety matters.	CLC 125(1)(z.03)
		▪ When necessary, develop, implement and monitor a program for the provision of personal protective equipment, clothing, devices or materials.	CLC 125(1)(z.13)
		Take all reasonable care to ensure that all persons granted access to the work place, other than the employer's employees, are informed of every known or foreseeable health or safety hazard to which they are likely to be exposed in the work place.	CLC 125(1)(z.14)

ITEMS		RISK MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS	LEGISLATIVE REFERENCES
2.	Duties of Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use any safety materials, equipment, devices and clothing that are intended for the employee's protection and furnished to the employee by the employer or that are prescribed. 	CLC 126(1)(a)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Follow prescribed procedures with respect to the health and safety of employees. 	CLC 126(1)(b)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Take all reasonable and necessary precautions to ensure the health and safety of the employee, the other employees and any person likely to be affected by the employee's acts or omissions. 	CLC 126(1)(c)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Comply with all instructions from the employer concerning the health and safety of employees. 	CLC 126(1)(d)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Report to the employer any thing or circumstance in a work place that is likely to be hazardous to the health or safety of the employee, or that of the other employees or other persons granted access to the work place by the employer. 	CLC 126(1)(g)
3.	Internal Complaint Resolution Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An employee who believes on reasonable grounds that there has been a contravention or that there is likely to be an accident or injury to health arising out of, linked with or occurring in the course of employment shall make a complaint to the employee's supervisor. 	CLC 127.1
4.	Refusal to Work if Danger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An employee may refuse to use or operate a machine or thing, to work in a place or to perform an activity, if the employee while at work has reasonable cause to believe that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the use or operation of the machine or thing constitutes a danger to the employee or to another employee; (b) a condition exists in the place that constitutes a danger to the employee; or (c) the performance of the activity by the employee constitutes a danger to the employee or to another employee. 	CLC 128(1)(a)(b)(c)

APPENDIX B: Pandemic Readiness Planning Considerations

POLICIES/PROCEDURES/PLANS		CONSIDERATIONS
1.	Business Continuity Plans (BCP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ BCPs should be developed or reviewed to ensure the identification of critical functions and surge capacity requirements so that essential services are provided during a pandemic. ▪ BCPs should also take into consideration the availability of and requirement for personal protective equipment to ensure service continuity. ▪ The availability of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and Critical Incident Stress Management services should be considered in BCPs.
2.	Managing the Spread of Infection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To limit the spread of infection, employees who are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 must not come to work and, if they are at work, must be sent home. ▪ Clear direction must be provided to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 virus.
3.	Healthy Workplace Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It is the employer's duty to protect the health and safety of employees and anyone else who visits its premises. ▪ During a pandemic, the employer has the responsibility to take all reasonable precautionary measures to ensure that the workplace is free from infection and to prevent the spread of infection. ▪ Healthy workplace practices during a pandemic should address the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) social distancing; b) personal hygiene; c) cleanliness of premises; and d) personal protective equipment (if required).
4.	Effect of Travel During a Pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Travel during a pandemic can be limited. It may be advisable to develop a plan to restrict both domestic and international travel and an additional plan for expatriate employees to return home. For international travel and for expatriate employees, the concern must be the potential for border closures when the pandemic hits.

APPENDIX C: Recommended Personal Measures to Limit the Spread of COVID-19

PERSONAL MEASURE	SOME HOW-TO TIPS
Hand Hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Frequent and careful handwashing is an effective way of preventing the spread of infection. Wash your hands regularly with warm, soapy water, especially before and after eating, after going to the bathroom, after coughing or sneezing, and after touching surfaces that may have been contaminated. ▪ Remove jewellery before washing hands. Rinse hands under warm running water. Lather with soap and rub, covering all surfaces of the hands and fingers (minimum of 20 seconds). Rinse under warm running water. Dry hands thoroughly with a single-use towel. Turn off faucet without re-contaminating hands, e.g., using a single-use towel. ▪ Alcohol-based hand sanitizers (with an alcohol concentration of 60% to 90%) should be used only if you do not have soap and water. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers do not contain antibiotics, but the alcohol acts as a disinfectant.
Cough and Sneeze Etiquette	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The virus can travel one metre in the air and can live several hours on your hands and surfaces. ▪ Limit the spread of infection by covering your nose and mouth with your hand or tissue when coughing or sneezing, especially if near other people. Use a tissue, or raise your arm up to your face to cough, or sneeze into your sleeve. ▪ Throw away used tissues promptly and wash your hands as soon as possible.
Social Distancing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social distancing strategies are non-medical measures intended to reduce the spread of disease from person to person by discouraging or preventing people from coming into close contact with each other. ▪ Some options include, but are not limited to, the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Avoid handshakes (encourage non-contact greetings). b) Avoid face-to-face meetings. Use telemeetings instead. c) Cancel or postpone non-essential meetings/workshops/training sessions. d) Meet in large meeting rooms and minimize meeting times. e) Avoid using public pens or whiteboard markers — carry your own. f) Avoid sharing computer keyboards. g) Avoid the lunchroom rush. h) Avoid cafeterias and restaurants. i) Avoid commuter rush periods. j) Avoid unnecessary travel (especially to endemic regions).
Cleaning of Surface Contact Material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The COVID-19 virus can live outside the body on hard surfaces, such as stainless steel and plastic, for up to 48 hours and on soft surfaces, such as cloth, paper, and tissues for less than 8-12 hours; however, it can only infect a person for up to 2-8 hours after being deposited on hard surfaces, and for up to a few minutes after being deposited on soft surfaces. ▪ Regularly clean surfaces to minimize the spread of the virus.

APPENDIX D: Emergency Response/Stress Management

During a pandemic, employees may be required to coordinate or manage personal, family-related and professional activities or commitments on short notice; prepare for an emergency assignment; work long, variable hours; meet strict deadlines; lodge in hotels; have irregular meals and rest periods; be unable to maintain regular communication with family members (because of work requirements); and make sensitive decisions of a political, economic or operational nature. All of these variables may lead to excessive stress.

Reacting to stress is normal, but not everyone experiences stress in the same way. Variables that affect our reaction to stress can include our support systems, our emotional makeup, our thoughts about the situation, our actions during and after a critical incident, and how much the event reminds us of some personal issue(s). For some individuals, their stress reactions may interfere with their ability to function normally during and after the situation.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS RELATING TO STRESS

The following are some stress-related signs and symptoms:

- nausea, dizziness, confusion
- difficulty making decisions
- difficulty concentrating
- frustration, anxiety, irritability
- sleep disturbances
- general fatigue
- crying
- headaches
- sense of feeling overwhelmed
- apathy
- loss of appetite
- increase in the intake of alcohol or an increase in smoking
- frequent interpersonal conflict
- short-term memory difficulties
- shortened attention span
- tension
- negative feelings such as profound sadness or helplessness

Long term exposure could lead to:

- physical pain
- heart disease
- digestive problems
- sleep problems
- depression
- obesity
- autoimmune diseases
- skin conditions, such as eczema

STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

The following are some stress management techniques:

- Establish a comfort zone and respect it
- Identify and respect personal limitations to prevent burnout
- Ensure good food intake to sustain your energy and well-being
- Take rest periods and do exercise
- Maintain a positive attitude
- Try to avoid excessive caffeine intake
- Maintain regular contact with family and friends.
- Share your concerns, thoughts and feelings with someone you trust
- Contact the Employee Assistance Program at 1-800-268-7708 (24/7) or 1-800-567-5803 (TDD) should you require counselling services

APPENDIX E: Additional Web References

Reference	Link
Canada Labour Code, Part II	https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/L-2/page-1.html
Collective Agreements	https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/agreements-conventions/index-eng.aspx
Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) Procurement Manual (contracting)	http://intranet.vac-acc.gc.ca/eng/workplace-services/finance/procurement-contracting-management/manual
Policy on Employee Assistance Program	http://intranet.vac-acc.gc.ca/eng/human-resources/healthy-workplace/employee-assistance
<i>Financial Administration Act</i>	https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/F-11/
Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada – Travel Reports and Warnings	http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/menu-eng.asp
Public Health Agency of Canada	https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html
<i>Policy on Government Security</i>	http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=16578
Health Canada, Workplace Health and Public Safety	https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/workplace/health-safety.html
Policy on Interchange Canada	http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=12552&section=text#sec4.2
Directive on Leave and Special Working Arrangements	https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=15774&section=glossary
Operational Security Standard – Business Continuity Planning (BCP) Program	http://publiservice.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pubs_pol/gospubs/TBM_12A/ossbcp-nsopca_e.asp
Public Health Agency of Canada – Travel Health	https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/travel-health.html
Public Service Commission of Canada	https://www.canada.ca/en/public-service-commission.html
Risk Management	https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/corporate/risk-management.html
VAC Telework Policy	http://intranet.vac-acc.gc.ca/pdf/hr/telepol_e.pdf
World Health Organization	https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019
Province of Prince Edward Island advisory	https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/alert/advisory-coronavirus-infection
Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) Procurement Manual (contracting)	http://intranet.vac-acc.gc.ca/eng/workplace-services/finance/procurement-contracting-management/manual