



Accessible practices for returning to the workplace

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About Accessibility Standards Canada

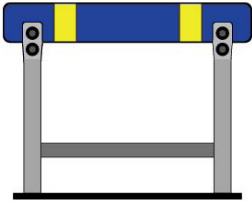
- Created under the Accessible Canada Act to:
 - develop and review accessibility standards for federally regulated organizations*; and
 - support and promote innovative research that identifies, removes, and prevents accessibility barriers.
- Accessibility is about creating inclusive communities for all. The Accessible Canada Act promotes the creation of a Canada without barriers.

***Federally regulated organizations:** Government of Canada departments and agencies, and private sector organizations like banks and those that operate in the federal transportation network.

About these guidelines

- Practical safety guidelines for employees with disabilities and their managers in times of emergencies or public health crisis.
- These guidelines address accessibility barriers that may exist when returning to the workplace.
- These guidelines were created for COVID-19 as guidance but can be used for other emergencies.
- National disability organizations and other stakeholders helped create these guidelines.
- The information is not meant as medical or legal advice. When needed, seek advice from:
 - a public health authority;
 - a legal professional;
 - your union; and,
 - your workplace occupational health and safety committee.

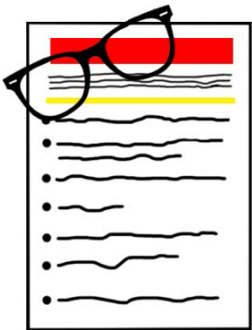
Getting started



- Emergencies may add new barriers to the lives of persons with disabilities. This may affect their ability to work. Employees and their managers must work together to remove these barriers.

Before returning to the workplace after an emergency, managers should:

- Review the occupational health and safety practices of their workplace. Their workplace's Occupational Health and Safety Committee should also be involved to review process.
- Review occupational health and safety practices often and change them if needed.



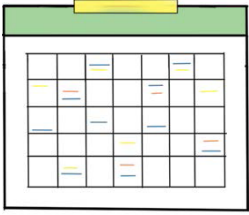
Some employees may have health conditions that you do not know about, making them more vulnerable when returning to the workplace. For example, people who use mobility devices or have vision loss need to touch surfaces more often to get around.

- Consider how you can reduce risk given these circumstances.

Key takeaways:

- Involve employees with disabilities early in the planning process to ensure accommodations are in place.
- Show employees the steps taken to support their safety before they return to the workplace.
- Communicate new procedures in plain language. Sign language and other alternate formats should always be available if needed.
- Meet with employees with disabilities often to be sure all accessibility and safety needs are met.

Scheduling



When arranging employees' schedules, consider:

- start and end times to make physical distancing easier. This will allow for cleaning the surfaces that are touched often.
- public transit scheduling, including para transit;
- childcare.

Cleaning

Hand washing



- Employees and clients must have easy access to soap and water.
- Hand sanitizers with alcohol can create barriers for people with chemical sensitivities. Provide alternatives from the Health Canada approved list.¹
- Employees and clients should wash or sanitize their hands when entering the office.

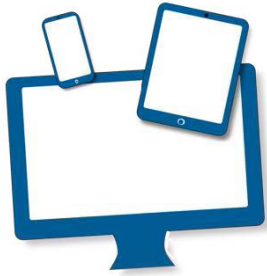
Important note: some employees with disabilities are not able to wash hands or use hand sanitizer. Managers need to work with them to find another solution.

Cleaning

A proper cleaning of the workplace will protect the health of all employees by reducing the spread of COVID-19 and other viruses. Managers should speak with their employees about any cleaning obstacles, which can be unique to the workplace or the individual.

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>

Tips for a clean workplace



- Clean frequently shared equipment and other surfaces that are touched often at least twice a day and when visibly dirty. Some of these surfaces include:
 - phones;
 - computers;
 - doorknobs and automatic door openers;
 - elevator buttons;
 - light switches;
 - washrooms;
 - counters;
 - handrails;
 - touch screen surfaces; and,
 - keypads.²
- When possible, stop activities that involve touching surfaces, such as scanning an access card or punching a timecard.
- Limit the use of shared equipment like photocopiers. Use digital documents or buy voice-controlled photocopiers.

About cleaning products



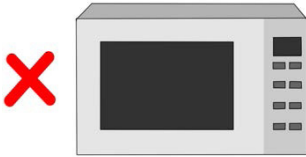
- Use alcohol-based cleaning products.
- Do not use products that could damage the device.
- Only choose disinfectants that have a Drug Identification Number (DIN). A DIN is an 8-digit number given by Health Canada that shows it is approved for use in Canada.
- Always check the product's expiry date.³
- Discuss cleaning rules and products with employees who have chemical sensitivities. This will help in choosing cleaning products that are safe for everyone.

2 <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet-covid-19-environmental-cleaning.pdf?la=en>

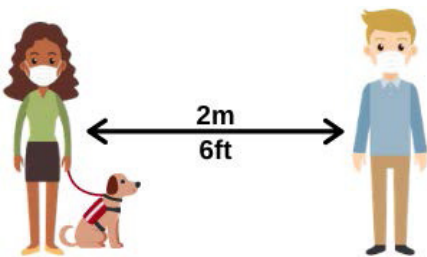
3 <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/covid-19/pub/2020/03/factsheet-covid-19-environmental-cleaning.pdf?la=en>

Shared spaces

- Set up shared spaces, like lunch or meeting rooms, to allow for physical distancing.
- Consider removing items that people share from these spaces, like:
 - plates and cutlery;
 - microwaves;
 - kettles and coffee makers;
 - mugs;
 - pens and paper;
 - water jugs;
 - touch screens; and
 - telephones.
- Encourage employees to use ice packs to keep their meals cool. This will limit the use of a shared refrigerator.

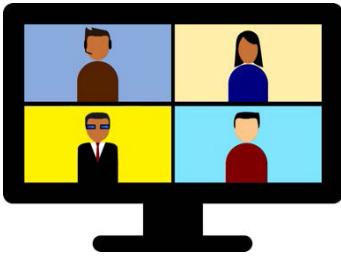


Physical distancing



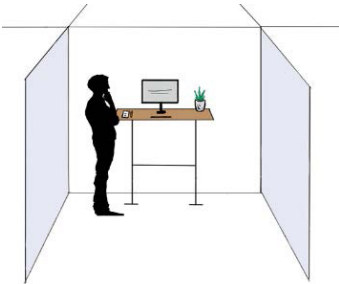
- Due to COVID-19, people must maintain a distance of 6 feet, or two metres, from one another (if possible). This could be different for other viruses.
- Physical distancing needs may limit the number of people allowed in a space, like a meeting room or elevators. For instance, employees with mobility devices or service animals may need more space to move.
- Physical distancing can also present challenges for employees with visual impairments. For example, they may not know how much distance there is between them and their colleagues. To guide these individuals without touching, be descriptive. Give detailed instructions so that the person has a better idea of the space around them.

Tips for physical distancing



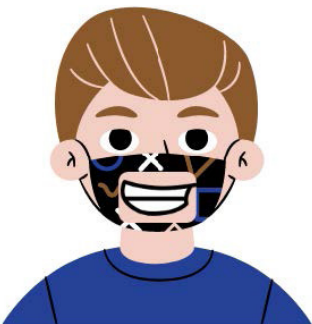
- Choose online meeting platforms when possible.
- Make physical distancing clear with accessible floor markings (such as arrows) and signs.⁴
- Give clear and accessible physical distancing information to employees. This could include fact sheets, posters, and American Sign Language and Langue des signes québécoise videos.

Workstations



- Employee workstations should be separated by cubicle walls. These walls must be higher than people's heads.⁵
- Workstations should be cleaned at least twice a day.
- Clear dividers should separate employees from clients. The dividers should cover the 'breathing zone' for people of different heights.

Face masks



- Give information on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in the workplace to employees before their return to work. In some locations, you are required to wear masks inside public places.
- Facemasks may create new barriers. This is particularly true for people who are deaf, deafblind, deafened or hard of hearing. Masks can muffle voices, hide lip movements and facial expressions.
- Consider masks with clear panels for lip-readers.
- Headsets with built-in microphones for high quality sound and other accessible equipment options are also helpful.

4 <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/lifting-public-health-measures.html>

5 <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/risk-informed-decision-making-workplaces-businesses-covid-19-pandemic.html>

Work-related travel (outside of traveling to and from the workplace)



- Travel for work during emergencies should only be considered if necessary.
- Employees must check with the local public health or transportation agencies to determine which safety measures are needed.
- Employees with disabilities should call transportation services, hotels, and event venues before travelling. This will allow them to make sure that accommodations are available. If they are not available, other arrangements should be made.

If you feel ill



- Individuals with symptoms of COVID-19 or other viruses should stay home until it is safe to return to work.
- Sick and personal leave policies should allow employees to stay home when they are:
 - Ill;
 - COVID-19 positive;
 - In quarantine; or,
 - Caring for children or someone who is ill.
- Reminders to stay home when sick should be posted around the workplace. They should be available in plain language and in alternate formats as needed.

Emergency procedures

- Extra thought should go into planning emergency evacuations for employees with disabilities.

Role of managers

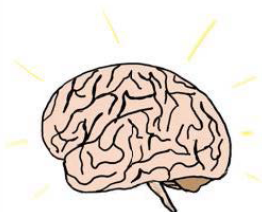


- Work with their employees with disabilities and their Occupational Health and Safety committee.
- Remind employees of emergency evacuation rules in the workplace.
- Communicate any changes to these rules.
- Ensure employees with disabilities have an adapted plan in case of an emergency.

Tips to prepare for an emergency

- Get partners (and backup partners) to help employees with disabilities to leave the building, when required.
- Have emergency drills to make sure that everyone understands their roles.
- Let employees know of any changes to procedures.
- Update emergency plans as needed.

Mental health



Emergencies can affect people's mental health and well-being.

Talking about mental and emotional well-being should become a common practice in the workplace. For example, have discussions often at team meetings or in one-on-one meetings between managers and employees.

Tips for managers:



- Encourage employees to take care of their mental health.
- Encourage employees to take regular breaks.
- Encourage employees to contact a health care professional if they are suffering.

Resource

To understand how to create and keep a mentally healthy and safe workplace, read the CSA and Bureau de normalisation du Québec's [Psychological health and safety in the workplace – Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation](#) (CAN/CSA-Z1003-13/BNQ 9700-803/2013).

Contact us!

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