

COVID-19 and the Workplace: General Precautions and a Risk Assessment

The Office of the Chief Public Health Officer for the NWT has recommended that all travellers from outside of the territory self-isolate for 14 days. These efforts will contribute to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our territory.

The continued movement of goods and the ongoing delivery of essential services is important for our communities. Therefore, an exemption to the request to self-isolate for 14 days should be provided to workers who are critical to preserving life, health and basic societal functioning.

Primary prevention is key, so essential service workers should not travel outside the territory unless travel is part of the essential services they provide.

ALL travellers from outside the territory are considered potential carriers of the virus and must self-isolate at home or a similar place in which to stay.

To preserve essential services, it is key to consider the risk that a returning worker could pose by endangering the health of multiple other essential service staff, which could jeopardize the ability to provide essential services.

If an essential employee chooses to self-identify as high risk for severe outcomes (age over 60, cardiovascular disease, chronic lung disease, diabetes, cancer, immune suppression), workplaces must have a plan that minimizes exposures for these individuals.

Leadership of essential service should follow the recommended 14 day self-isolation after travel guidance as far as practical and establish thresholds where the delivery of the essential services can no longer be delivered and then, and only then, make decisions to waive individual workers from the self-isolation protocol based on an overall risk assessment of:

- Where the person travelled, recognizing that many areas in Canada and countries in the world are experiencing significant community transmission of the virus.
- Duration and type of activity while away (family visit versus large gathering events)
- Current symptoms of the individual or household. If there are any symptoms demonstrated by the individual or those they live with, they should be assessed by a health professional before returning to work.
- Essential service type and overall risk of reduced or minimal staffing
- Work environment of the individual e.g. whether they work independently, outside or in a group setting.

Essential services must establish a protocol to prevent risk of transmission by an essential service worker with a travel history, support rapid response to an essential service worker with a travel history who develops symptoms while at work and maintain high levels of hygiene. Key elements of such a protocol are:

- Workers who return from travel and critical to the delivery of an essential service may return to work but must take the following additional precautions to reduce the risk to their clients, colleagues, and the public should they become symptomatic:
 - [Self-monitor daily](#) for signs and symptoms of illness
 - There must be active daily monitoring by employer of staff for COVID-19 symptoms (i.e. checking for cough, fever, shortness of breath)
 - Follow infection prevention and control protocols including diligent hand hygiene
 - Reduce close contact with other workers i.e. maintain a two metre separation and avoid shared spaces where possible

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- Avoid close contact with others when travelling to and from work and between shifts
- Self-isolate at home on days when not required at their workplace
- Avoid any unnecessary public establishments
- Implement a company-wide, self-distancing policy for all employees requiring a minimum physical distance of 1 to 2 meters between individuals. This includes avoiding standard greetings that require physical contact such as shaking hands
- Increase regularly scheduled cleaning with a disinfecting agent such as sanitizing disposable wipes or a bleach solution,
- Require workers to self-declare to supervisor/dispatch or their health care practitioner, if they have come in contact with anyone who has COVID-19 and self-isolate if instructed by a health practitioner
- Require workers, if they exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g., fever, cough, etc.) to call their public health unit or health centre, or their health practitioner, and self-isolate for 14 days unless instructed otherwise by a health practitioner.