



COVID-19: Return to Work Guiding Principles



Why we made this

The Medisys Health Group has been a renowned Canadian medical expert and healthcare provider for years, and we pride ourselves in offering outstanding, patient-friendly care to thousands of Canadians and supporting employers across the country. The COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented event in history, bringing the world to a halt and forcing employers to adapt to a reality in which most employees have to work from home. Now that restrictions are starting to loosen, companies need to develop a strategy and implement a plan to bring their workforce back to the office in a way that makes employees feel safe and keeps them healthy.

We gathered some of our overarching guidelines around returning to work to help you develop that strategy for your organization. Our medical experts are also at your disposal and available for additional guidance on how to best support your employees and protect your business.

Core values

- Prioritize the health and safety of team members, customers, and Canadians
- Remain diligent about practices that help mitigate further outbreaks, even as measures to reopen the economy are being implemented.

Guiding Principles

- Maintain proactive public health measures for the health of team members and public
- Communicate with your employees, clearly, frequently, and honestly. Everyone needs information and reassurance, especially when coming back to work.
- Develop a talent strategy to protect the health and well-being of all employees, especially those at elevated risk of complications
- Maintain a forward-thinking, medically-driven lens to post-pandemic planning that emphasizes transparency and caution



Developing your Return to Work strategy

We recognize that many factors will influence your Return to Work (RTW) strategy, but here are the four steps we recommend all organizations consider while developing their plans:

- 1. Assess your environment.**
New safety protocols will be different at a corporate office than at a mining site, so it's important to complete a thorough risk assessment of your workplace or job site to anticipate and mitigate potential risks unique to your environment.
- 2. Develop a screening protocol.**
Proper screening of employees and customers will play a crucial role in controlling the spread of COVID-19 as social distancing protocols loosen and Canadians start going back to work. Follow local guidelines for your workplace, establish additional screening procedures relevant to your industry, and seek personalized, expert advice.
- 3. Offer quality mental health support.**
The pandemic has taken a toll on Canadians' mental health, and experts anticipate that the long-term repercussions will be severe. Employers who understand this reality, apply it to their RTW planning, and lead with it at heart will be more likely to return to a happier, more productive workforce.
- 4. Plan for disability management.**
Employers must prepare for an increase in disability management cases, as previously low-risk employees fall into high-risk demographics post-pandemic, i.e. older adults and those with pre-existing medical conditions. They will now require additional risk assessments, modified RTW plans, and sensitivity.

Ensuring a safe office environment post COVID-19

- Strongly support that employees wear non-medical face masks in all public or shared areas.
- Those who can work from home should, especially those who are in a vulnerable group (i.e. people over 60 years old, pregnant women, or those with co-morbidities).
- People should self-monitor for symptoms. Anyone with any symptoms should immediately self-isolate and contact their healthcare provider or conduct a [virtual consult](#) as they may need to get tested. Their close contacts should follow public health guidance around self-isolation.
- Have hand sanitizer available around the office and ensure that the office is being cleaned very frequently.
- Avoid physical meetings. If they do need to happen, keep them short, small, and be diligent about distancing, hand hygiene, and masks.
- Discourage sharing spaces.
- When relevant and possible, create a schedule that makes crowds impossible.
- Work with your property manager to have hand sanitizer in elevators; consider signage to encourage people to use keys to press floor buttons, or have tissues available to press buttons.
- Elevators should only take three people at most.
- Create physical barriers where needed, i.e. plexiglass at cash registers.
- Cafeterias should move to takeaway and lunch hours extended to prevent crowds.



Maintaining physical distancing & hygiene measures

The most effective way to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus remains the practice of physical distancing, good hand hygiene, and diligent cleaning of surfaces.

Hand hygiene & disinfecting

- Maintain current emphasis on hand hygiene
- Continue emphasis on enhanced disinfecting (see [Canada workplaces cleaning](#))
- Provide hand sanitizer for team members and customers
- Disinfect touched surfaces after each use

Handling products between customers and employees

- No shaking of hands, even with gloves on
- Avoid touching or handing over items such as credit cards or purchased products
- Design for contactless interactions (e.g. put credit card or device on counter to be picked up under plexiglass)

Gloves

- While helpful, gloves are not a substitute for diligent hand hygiene
- May be used for time-limited activities when handling items (e.g. cash or multiple items recently received from public)

Symptoms

Remember the symptoms to look for. Anyone showing these symptoms should immediately be sent home to self-quarantine for 14 days.

- Cough
- Fever higher than 37.8
- Runny / stuffy nose
- Sore throat

Unsure about your symptoms? Our [COVID self-assessment tool](#) can help.

A note on face masks

“My mask protects you, your mask protects me.”



- Cloth masks help reduce the spread of the virus from people who may be asymptomatic, by preventing the spread of droplets both on surfaces and person-to-person.
- Encourage personal **non-medical face masks** for all settings (use properly, reuse as appropriate)
- Cloth face coverings should:
 - ▶ Fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
 - ▶ Be secured with ties or ear loops
 - ▶ Include filter or multiple layers of fabric
 - ▶ Allow for breathing without restriction
 - ▶ Be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape
- Masks can be **removed or adjusted in personal workspace**, when it is possible to maintain a 2-metre distance from others (making sure to maintain hand hygiene)
- Consider **cultural and equity impact of masks**. For example,
 - ▶ Consider the impact on people with disabilities, including [people experiencing hearing loss](#)
 - ▶ Adapt to your environment. SickKids Hospital, for example, is starting to use masks with employees' faces on them to alleviate possible fear in children.

Learn how to [make your own face mask](#).

Know who is at higher risk of complications

Prioritize accommodations for individuals who are considered high-risk, or consider calling them back at a later date

Groups at higher risk include:

- 60 years of age or older
- Women who are pregnant or recently gave birth
- Individuals getting treatment that weakens their immune system
(i.e. chemotherapy, medication for transplants, corticosteroids, TNF inhibitors)
- Those with a condition that compromises their immune system
(i.e. lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, other autoimmune disorder)
- Individuals having a chronic (long lasting) health condition
(i.e. diabetes, emphysema, asthma, heart condition)
- Anyone regularly going to a hospital or healthcare setting for treatment
(i.e. dialysis, surgery, cancer treatment)

A Few Notes

- This list of risks is non-exhaustive and will expand as we learn more about the virus.
- Address the social determinants of health with an HR and labour law perspective.
- Outside of those with pre-existing conditions and those at high-risk, some other groups may be inequitably impacted by pandemic measures:
 - Parents and caregivers
 - People experiencing mental health and addictions
 - Other equity-deserving communities





Additional Resources

The information around COVID-19 and its corresponding Return to Work guidelines are ever evolving.

This playbook is meant as a general guide to help companies like yours plan a safe return for your employees. We also offer additional resources for those of you looking for more customized guidance:

- ✓ Medical advice, webinars, and communications support
- ✓ Virtual screening, primary care, and mental health support
- ✓ Onsite readiness screening and support



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