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COVID-19:

# A Guide to Safely Reopening Your Organization During the Pandemic



# As Canada begins to reopen its doors, all provinces are implementing tailored approaches for when and how businesses and organizations can safely do so.

Following all federal and provincial health and safety requirements, abiding by any industry-specific restrictions, and preparing to pivot plans, if needed, is key.

Having a reasonable and documented approach in place for reopening will be necessary to ensure a smooth transition back to work. Ecclesiastical's Risk Control Specialists have developed this guide to assist you in putting together a comprehensive plan, ensuring a safe return to the workplace.

## Preparations Before Reopening

As provinces begin to loosen restrictions and announce plans for reopening, organizations must determine if they can both legally and safely reopen their premises. Breaching a government order could result in substantial fines and other penalties being imposed.

But beyond the minimum legal requirements lies an obligation all organizations have; namely, to ensure a safe environment for their employees, volunteers, customers and visitors.

The first step after getting the provincial go-ahead to reopen is to assess the premises and determine whether the organization is reasonably able to implement any new policies and procedures that may be deemed necessary as a result of the current pandemic. Things to consider include:

- Checking all equipment prior to reopening if your premises has been closed for some time
- Conducting a detailed Health and Safety risk assessment and walk through of the facility to identify specific conditions or tasks that may increase the risk of exposure of employees, volunteers, customers and visitors to COVID-19
- Determine what physical modifications are required to update your space to the appropriate new standards and to maintain the basic two-meter physical distancing requirement, such as the installation of plexi-glass screens and barriers as needed
- Determine whether additional process-based modifications are required such as implementing daily screening questionnaires for all employees, volunteers, customers and visitors
- Develop enhanced daily premises cleaning and sanitation processes, paying attention to all high-touch surfaces
- Obtain Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and any other necessary safety equipment
- Flush all water lines, paying attention to drinking water faucets, coffee machines, ice machines, etc.
- Draft a Return to Work Policy, distribute internally and provide training based on the new policies as needed
- Where applicable, ask external vendors for COVID-19 policies and ensure alignment

Prepare to keep the communication and conversation open throughout every step of reopening — policies are made to change with changing times. Flexibility is required, especially in the instance of a pandemic.

# Upon Initial Opening

While the safest way to slow the spread of COVID-19 has proven to be the elimination of physical contact between people, continued self-isolation and working from home are not possible for every organization. As more and more organizations begin to contemplate a return to premises-based operations, ensuring full compliance with all provincial guidelines is crucial. There are several key measures all organizations need to consider and implement before welcoming back employees, volunteers, customers, and visitors to their premises including:

## Physical Distancing

- Follow provincial guidelines to limit the number of people in the physical space
- Limit entrance and exit points, and consider whether emergency evacuation plans need to be updated to address the proposed changes
- Prominently display directional signage to control the flow of foot traffic and encourage the appropriate physical spacing of two meters throughout your premises
- Determine the number of people able to safely use building amenities, including elevators and washrooms. Display clear signage, indicating the appropriate occupancy loading of these amenities
- Avoid all physical greetings such as handshakes, fist bumps and hugging
- Consider staggering employee start times and modify staffing hours. Create and maintain a lunch and break schedule, to avoid a “lunchtime rush”
- Where possible, hold virtual meetings and tele-conferences in place of in-person meetings
- Prioritize the needs of those who are high-risk/ vulnerable and encourage open communication around those needs
- Cancel all non-essential off-site meetings and discourage social events and gatherings at this time

## Infrastructure Modifications

- Rearrange workspaces and floor plans, so that two-meter distancing rules can be maintained
- Post signage at entrances reminding people not to enter the premises if they are sick or have any symptoms associated with COVID-19
- Install physical barriers to effectively separate employees, volunteers, customers, visitors and other third parties as needed
- If possible, eliminate all sharing of tools and equipment between employees and volunteers (keyboards, staplers etc.). Provide easy-access disinfectants if elimination is not possible
- Utilize new technologies where appropriate, such as going paperless, and encouraging direct deposit and electronic funds transfer rather than handling cash donations

## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- The organization must follow federal and provincial regulations for using PPE
- All employees and volunteers must be trained on PPE usage, including donning and doffing, cleaning, maintenance, and disposal
- The organization’s risk assessment will determine if visitors / customers entering the premises require a face covering or mask
- Be mindful that medical-grade supplies are essential for healthcare workers and are in limited supply

## Employee/Volunteer Hygiene

- Introduce enhanced cleaning procedures to ensure that the facility is regularly disinfected and sanitized throughout the day
- Purchase critical supplies: hand sanitizers, soap, disinfecting wipes, masks, gloves, thermometers
- Ensure employees and volunteers always have access to masks, soap, water and alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Washing hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds is a necessity, especially after sneezing, coughing and using the washroom, or when preparing food and before eating
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth at all times
- Dispose of any used PPE and tissues into a garbage receptacle immediately after use
- Post signage to both promote and encourage good hygiene practices

## Food Safety

- Preparing and serving of meals can continue as normal following federal and provincial standards
- Those preparing food should complete food handling certification through their provincial health board
- Regular cleaning and disinfecting in the kitchen using the recommended products is required
- Surfaces that have encountered a foreign object should be immediately disinfected, as the Coronavirus can live on surfaces for hours or days
- Use white vinegar and warm water to thoroughly wash fruits and vegetables

## Health Considerations & Questions

All employees, volunteers, customers and visitors should be asked to self-report any COVID-19 related symptoms prior to entering the premises and any symptomatic individual should be denied access. If possible, establish a single point of entry, have prominent signage posted and where feasible have a member of staff act as a "screener", ready to ask a series of questions of all those entering the premises. See our **"COVID-19 Screening Questionnaire"**

- If anyone on the premises is experiencing symptoms or risk factors related to COVID-19 ask the affected individual to leave the premises immediately and contact public health for guidance
- Remind those entering the premises that if they subsequently become ill after entering, they should notify their immediate supervisor or a member of staff and immediately return home
- Follow all published public health guidance and protocols for identifying other employees, volunteers or visitors who may have come into contact with the affected individual
- Thoroughly clean, sanitize and disinfect all areas, surfaces and objects the symptomatic individual has come into contact with

# You're Open Again - Now What?

## Plans, Policies & Procedures

- Organizations should now have a formal plan in place for how to handle ongoing changes
- Changes may include how to safely operate, provide services, manage workplace absenteeism, requests from employees who do not want to return to work or employees who request to remain working from home
- Always consult with a human resource professional before making decisions. Ecclesiastical policyholders have free and unlimited access to our HRAssist service; the experts at HRAssist will listen to your situation and offer solid, actionable assistance on how to proceed
- A business continuity plan will assist in both crisis management and recovery. Every organization should have one as part of their risk management strategy
- Ensure revisions are made and ready for a potential second wave of this pandemic
- Update emergency contact information for your organization

Contact your broker, an Ecclesiastical Risk Control Specialist or visit our website at [ecclesiastical.ca](http://ecclesiastical.ca) for details on how to access HRAssist and for information on how to create a Business Continuity Plan.

Finding ways to reimagine a forward-looking environment that minimizes disruption for your organization requires a fine balance. Being flexible in the need to sharply pivot established ideas, while balancing your organization's mission with government guidelines, all the while communicating clearly to your stakeholders will be a challenge. Remember to prioritize the safety of people first, and look for ways to keep your employees, volunteers, customers and visitors safe. And remember to communicate. Clear, transparent and timely communications are necessary when reshaping how you will fulfill your mission and secure ongoing support from all your stakeholders.

For further guidance, refer to the COVID-19 News and Resources page on our website to access additional related materials: <https://ecclesiastical.ca/news-events/covid-19/>

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