

# Interim Recommendations for Community Organizations

March 29, 2020

## Measures to prevent COVID-19 in the workplace

These measures apply when ongoing community transmission has been confirmed by public health officials.

Community organizations must follow [public health instructions and guidelines](#) and take the necessary steps to protect the health and well-being of their workers and clients, in accordance with government guidance. Additional information and tools are available in the “Professionnels” section of the MSSS website and updated regularly as new information becomes available. These recommendations are intended to protect workers and volunteers in community organizations who may come into direct contact with clients, to protect the people who use the services of these organizations, and to minimize the spread of the virus in the general population. The measures contained in this fact sheet are specifically aimed at community organizations that provide essential services to **vulnerable populations**: <https://www.quebec.ca/sante/problemes-de-sante/a-z/coronavirus-2019/fermeture-endroits-publics-commerces-services-covid19/#c48419> (in French). These interim recommendations take into account the risks associated with transmission of the COVID-19 virus while essential services continue to be provided.

### To protect the health of employees and others in the workplace, employees and workers are asked to:

- 1) Adjust their work methods and hours to promote compliance with the instructions<sup>1</sup> to employees in mandatory isolation (telework), and to those who have other types of constraints (flexible hours, telework).
- 2) Inform people over age 70 and people with severe chronic illnesses (a doctor’s visit is recommended) that they may not volunteer at this time.
- 3) Operate with the minimal staff necessary to continue providing essential services.
- 4) **Adjust and maintain essential services:**
  - Identify critical jobs and positions and develop a plan for maintaining them (e.g., train new staff on multiple essential jobs).
  - Determine which non-essential services can be suspended.
  - Provide sufficient materials (e.g., food, hand soap, alcohol-based hand rub, cleaning products).

<sup>1</sup><https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/instructions-directives/>

- 5) Stagger hours to limit the number of people in the building at one time (e.g., hold two food distribution events rather than one, if possible, or distribute food by appointment).
- 6) Tell workers and volunteers not to report to work or organized activities if they have symptoms associated with the disease (fever, shortness of breath, or other symptoms as described at <https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/answers-questions-coronavirus-covid19/>).
  - If a worker or volunteer starts experiencing symptoms while at work or a volunteer activity, have a process in place so they can be isolated in a room and have them wear a medical (or surgical) mask. If one is not available, have them wear a scarf or bandana. Call 1-877-644-4545 for guidance.
- 7) To determine if they have symptoms, ask clients the following questions: Do you feel like you have a fever? Do you have a new cough? Do you have new flu-like symptoms? Are you more out of breath than usual? Or other symptoms as described at <https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/answers-questions-coronavirus-covid19/>.
  - If so, direct the symptomatic person to **an isolated room reserved for potential cases** (see *Site layout*).
  - Call the COVID information line at 1-877-644-4545.
  - If any of the following people have to stay in the building:
    - Someone returning from foreign travel
    - Someone waiting for a test or test result
    - Someone who is a confirmed case of COVID-19
    - Someone who has been in contact with a confirmed case

Public health isolation measures must be implemented. See the related fact sheet (consider the client's room as their home):

  - [Procedure to Follow on Return Home from Abroad - Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
  - [Procedure to Follow for People Waiting for A COVID-19 Test or Test Result](#)
  - [Procedure to Follow for People with COVID-19 in Isolation at Home](#)
  - [Procedure to Follow for People Who Have Been In Contact with a Confirmed Case of COVID-19](#)
- 8) Encourage employees, volunteers, and clients to practice good **hand hygiene**<sup>2</sup> by providing the necessary materials (e.g., running water, soap, alcohol-based hand rub, touchless trash cans, and disposable tissues, towels, and paper).
  - Make sure everyone washes their hands or uses an alcohol-based hand rub as soon as they enter the building:
    - Provide a hand washing station with soap and water and/or alcohol-based hand rub.
  - If possible, reserve a restroom for employees and volunteers only, not clients.
- 9) Encourage employees, volunteers, and clients to practice **respiratory etiquette**<sup>2</sup> by coughing into their elbow or into a tissue and discarding it immediately, then washing their hands as soon as possible).

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<sup>2</sup> See the materials produced by Ministère de la Santé at <https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/sujets/covid-19> (in French).

10) Promote **social distancing**<sup>2</sup> and advise people to:

- Avoid physical contact (e.g., shaking hands, hugging)
- Stay two metres apart and arrange the space to keep people as far apart as possible:
  - Create space between people in line:
    - a) Limit how many clients can be in the building and the line outside at one time.
    - b) Physically mark the ground or walls (using lines, stickers, cones, wooden structures, etc.) in the waiting line and other areas to indicate the two-metre distance to be maintained between clients.
    - c) Display signs or posters reminding clients of the physical distancing rules they must follow (at the entrance and in line).
    - d) Install an alcohol-based hand rub dispenser at the entrance and exit and encourage people to use it (e.g., hang posters).
    - e) If necessary, post an employee or volunteer at the entrance to greet and direct clients while maintaining a two-metre distance.
  - Create space between people when they are seated at a table.
  - Divide people into small groups or different rooms.
  - Passing someone without contact does not pose a risk (e.g., on the stairs or in the hallway).
- Avoid other gatherings.
- Do not share materials or equipment (e.g., tablets, pencils, communication devices, computer equipment).
- Remove unnecessary items from common areas (e.g., magazines, decorative items).
- Limit outings and travel to what is strictly necessary.
- Pay particular attention to spaces that are potential **bottlenecks** (e.g., building entrance, dining room entrance):
  - Don't let people line up close together in these areas.
  - If possible, schedule activities so as to limit the number of people in the same place at the same time.
  - Hang posters reminding people to wash their hands and practice respiratory etiquette and social distancing.

11) Prevent shared objects from being touched by multiple people. For example:

- Delegate someone to put cups and glasses out on a counter or table and serve the coffee. Then invite people to take turns picking up their coffee.
- Limit the use of books and board games to one client at a time and then disinfect them after each use with a regular disinfectant. See the list of approved products at <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>.

- 12) Disinfect **dining rooms, counters, common areas, and restrooms** with a regular disinfectant at least three times a day, or more depending on the number of people going in and out of the building. See the list of approved products at <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>.
- 13) At least every shift, clean **high-touch surfaces** used by workers and volunteers (e.g., desks, tables, counters, door handles, computer accessories, pencils) with your regular cleaning product. See the list of approved products at <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>.
  - Try to keep work assignments the same (workers and volunteers should work at the same workstations whenever possible).
  - Try to keep work groups the same.
- 14) High-touch surfaces in areas used by clients must be cleaned every two to four hours if possible.
  - Clean and disinfect visible stains (e.g., sputum) and soiled surfaces and objects immediately.
- 15) **Wear clothing that covers as much skin as possible**, given the unpredictable nature of working in an uncontrolled environment with people who may or may not provide reliable information.
  - At the end of the shift, remove clothing and place it in a plastic or cloth bag. Change your clothes right before leaving the building if possible. Wash clothing worn at work using regular laundry detergent. There is no need to separate it from other laundry.
- 16) Community organizations engage in a broad range of activities, so it is important to **have and enforce a pandemic plan tailored to your specific workplace** (<https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/en/document-000969/>).

## Prevention measures specific to certain situations, above and beyond the general prevention measures

### Prevention measures when interacting with individuals or groups:

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- A. Where possible, stay at least two metres away from other people and have them stay two metres apart from each other. Otherwise limit the interaction time:
  - No additional precautions are required when interacting with someone at a two-metre distance.
  - No additional precautions are required for a brief interaction (under 15 minutes) within a two-metre distance. Be sure to wash your hands afterwards.
- B. In situations requiring longer interaction with a client (over 15 minutes) or a short interaction with a high risk of aggression (e.g., spitting, biting, physical contact) that must be done within two metres:
  - Wear a medical mask (or a scarf if no mask is available), eye protection, and gloves.

- After the interaction, safely remove<sup>3</sup> the gloves, eye protection, and medical mask and dispose of them in a trash can (if available) or place them in a dedicated container or resealable bag and then discard them.
- Disinfect reusable equipment (e.g., eye protection (goggles)) with a suitable product.
- Be sure to wash your hands or use an alcohol-based hand rub after every interaction.
- If the client is showing symptoms (new cough, fever, or shortness of breath) and skin-to-skin contact occurs, or if the client coughs or sneezes in a worker's or volunteer's face, call 1-877-644-4545 for guidance.

*This recommendation is intended as a precautionary measure given the unpredictable nature of working in an uncontrolled environment with people who may or may not provide reliable information.*

C. Interacting with a person under investigation, a probable or confirmed case of COVID-19, or someone with symptoms associated with the disease (fever, cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms as described at <https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/answers-questions-coronavirus-covid19/>).

- If the worker or volunteer must get within two metres of the person, put on a medical (surgical) mask, eye protection, and gloves BEFORE entering the client's room or bedroom. Wear clothing that covers as much skin as possible.
  - A shield that completely covers the face down to the chin can be used as an alternative to the medical (surgical) mask and eye protection.
- Safely remove<sup>4</sup> the gloves, eye protection, and medical (surgical) mask as you leave the room and dispose of them onsite (if a touchless trash can is available) or place them in a dedicated container or resealable bag and then discard it back at your workstation without opening it.
- Disinfect reusable equipment (e.g., eye protection) with a suitable product.
- Be sure to wash your hands or use an alcohol-based hand rub after every interaction.
- If a worker or volunteer has prolonged contact (over 15 minutes), skin-to-skin contact occurs, or a client sneezes or coughs in their face, call 1-877-644-4545 for guidance.

## Specific measures for organizations that provide lodging

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- See the companion fact sheet "Recommandations à l'intention des organismes communautaires offrant de l'hébergement" (in French).

<sup>3</sup> Remove gloves, wash hands with an alcohol-based hand rub, remove eye protection, wash hands with an alcohol-based hand rub again, remove the mask by the elastics without touching the paper, and wash hands with an alcohol-based hand rub one last time.

<sup>4</sup> Remove gloves, wash hands with an alcohol-based hand rub, remove eye protection, wash hands with an alcohol-based hand rub again, remove the mask by the elastics without touching the paper, and wash hands with an alcohol-based hand rub one last time.

## Measures for home-based services

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- See the fact sheet “Recommandations à l’intention des travailleurs effectuant des visites à domicile (hors du domaine de la santé)” (in French).

## Prevention measures specific to food distribution organizations<sup>5</sup>

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- Limit the handling of objects, bags, and food by employees and clients and limit time spent in groups (when not essential). *For instance, food distribution organizations can prepare bags or boxes of food in advance to limit handling and congregating.*
- Ask that only one family member come to the organization (during a food distribution event, for instance).
- Deliver food to homes and organizations if possible.

## Prevention measures specific to kitchens and food service counters

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- Although COVID-19 does not appear to be transmitted through food, frequent hand washing and adherence to good food hygiene and safety practices are recommended:
  - When handling food, wash your hands:
    - Before and after handling food
    - After going to the bathroom, coughing, or sneezing
    - After touching a soiled surface
- Employees and volunteers handling food should avoid contact with anyone with symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing or sneezing.
- Dishes and utensils used by clients should be washed with water and regular dish soap or in the dishwasher.
- For more information, see [https://www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/fr/Avis\\_Publicite/Pages/COVID-19\\_QuestionsReponses.aspx](https://www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/fr/Avis_Publicite/Pages/COVID-19_QuestionsReponses.aspx) (in French).

If a client is a confirmed case of COVID-19 or awaiting a test result:

- Avoid using sprayers or brushes to dislodge food residue; instead presoak dishes or use a cloth or sponge.
- Wear gloves.
- Discard the cloth or sponge and gloves. If they are reusable, place them in a waterproof bag until they can be washed in hot water with regular detergent.
- Using a standard cleaning product, wash and disinfect work surfaces, counters, cutting boards, utensils, plates, cloths, and anything that has been in contact with food. See the list of approved products at <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>.
- Wash dirty dishes and utensils in the dishwasher or by hand with regular soap.

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<sup>5</sup> For Meals on Wheels, see the MSSS publication at <https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/fichiers/2019/19-210-37W.pdf> (in French).

## Prevention measures specific to play areas

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- Clean toys frequently, especially those that can be put in the mouth. Make sure you have all the required cleaning and disinfecting supplies. For more information, see:
  - <https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/document-000374/> (in French)
  - [Questions-réponses pour les responsables des services de garde d'urgence \(SDGU\) en petite-enfance et en milieu scolaire- Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) \(in French\)](#)
- Limit contact between children. For example, stagger the hours when the playroom or playground is used, space permitting.

### Related fact sheets:

- Sensibiliser les personnes utilisatrices de drogues et aux personnes en situation d'itinérance : <https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/fichiers/2019/19-210-27W.pdf> (in French).
- Stress, Anxiety and Depression Associated with the Coronavirus COVID-19 Disease: <https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/fichiers/2019/19-210-14WA.pdf>.

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**Note:** The recommendations above are based on the information available at the time of writing. With the situation and knowledge regarding the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) virus changing rapidly, these recommendations are subject to change.

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