



Employer Guide

Safely Returning to the Workplace

agilus
Work Solutions

Canada has never experienced a global pandemic in the twenty-first century. COVID-19 forced businesses to shut down and re-open only to shut down weeks later following further restrictions. For the past 18 months, it has been a myriad of openings and closures, limited supply chains, and shuttered borders. Companies had to re-evaluate their strategies and pivot operations to remain viable. Parents balanced working from home and children learning online. Suddenly everyone recognized the critical role essential services played within our society. Canada came together by staying apart. Now we need to open Canada back up for business – safely and gradually. So how do businesses keep employees healthy and safe as we return to the workplace that is the same, but also so different from the one they left months ago?

This guide offers some practical implementation steps for employers to consider prior to re-opening or expanding existing operations, with the understanding that when or how workplaces can re-open will rely largely on federal and provincial guidelines and requirements. When analyzing essential operations and the employees required to support those operations, employers must continue to focus on decreasing the risks to workers and ensuring steps are in place to avoid a resurgence of COVID-19.

Message from our CEO

"With COVID-19 restrictions continuing to lift across Canada, the reality of returning to workplace elicits not only excitement and enthusiasm for some sort of return to "normal" but also creates unique challenges for safely bringing staff back to the workplace. So much has changed over the past 18 months and we have to effectively manage our teams as they return to their new environment, ensuring productivity, engagement and motivation remain intact. One thing that hasn't changed – the health and safety of our employees remains our top priority."



Craig Brown
CEO | Agilus Work Solutions

The Reset – key considerations for employers

When the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a global pandemic, businesses had little time to prepare and respond. A general state of confusion and uncertainty ensued which was exacerbated by the constant flow of communications – 24 hour new feeds, daily government and public health authorities releases, and of course social media. Subject matter experts and health officials contradicted themselves and each other and there was no small share of armchair quarterbacks. Employers had to take immediate actions to keep their staff safe and determine how to keep essential business functions operating. As the months went on with no foreseeable end to the pandemic, many businesses took advantage of this “reset” to implement new technology, re-evaluate processes and procedures, reassess strategies, and revised budgets and staffing requirements.

Fast forward to today. More and more restrictions are being lifted and the reality of re-opening is finally here. There are many things that businesses need to consider as they continue to keep employees' health and safety a priority.



The Business Stages of COVID-19



When can we return
to the office?

CONFUSION

- Every province & sometimes county is different depending on COVID-19 new cases and/or vaccine penetration
- What are the local provincial and municipal rules for returning?
- Do new COVID-19 cases and/or percent of vaccinations completed affect returning?
- Will our employees want to come back?
- How do we keep employees and their families safe?
- Will our employees come back to office?
- What business needs do we have that require in-office, hybrid or remote work?

We are opening our
offices.

RESEARCH

- Establish a Return To Office (RTO) team that will be responsible for educating staff and completing all hazard assessments before employees return to the office
- Let's poll our workers to see what they are expecting
- What are our competitors doing?
- What are our legal obligations?
- Can we re-align our work culture to support various work scenarios?
- What is our landlord or facilities management company doing to prepare?
- Understand what schools and daycares are doing in the Fall – if possible

What will RTO look
like for our
employees?

PREPARATION

- Hybrid?
- What guidance will we offer managers and offices?
- Physically what do we need to change for our working spaces?
- How do we assess what we need to change to accommodate workspaces for distancing, number of workers in the office, barriers, cleaning protocols, etc.?





4 weeks before- COMMUNICATIONS

- RTO team complete risk assessment to determine required adaptations to work stations and common areas
- RTO Team to hold meetings with Managers to educate and prepare for the return of employees
- Send an all staff notice outlining safety & working expectations, including a timeline for next communication & contact names for questions
- Notify property management

3 weeks before:

- Managers meet with teams and individuals/ prepare RTO/Hybrid plan/work processes for team
- Confirm any office renovations will be made in time

One week out:

- Touch base with managers and individuals
- Send out guidance – what can people expect
- Physical inspection of space and confirmation it is safe

One day before:

- Welcome note and any reminders of safety protocols (masks, physical distancing in the workspace, elevators, lunchrooms, washrooms, etc.)

Day of RETURN TO OFFICE

- Managers meet with the team
- Managers meet one on one with both those RTO and WFH employees
- Establish daily or weekly routines
- Reiterate safety protocols and processes for illness reporting and recovery
- Stay abreast of government news and actions/new restrictions



Most workers in Canada want to return to the office, but about three-quarters prefer a “hybrid” model that allows some flexibility to work remotely, according to a survey of about 2,000 people done for KPMG.

Steps for Safely Returning to the Workplace

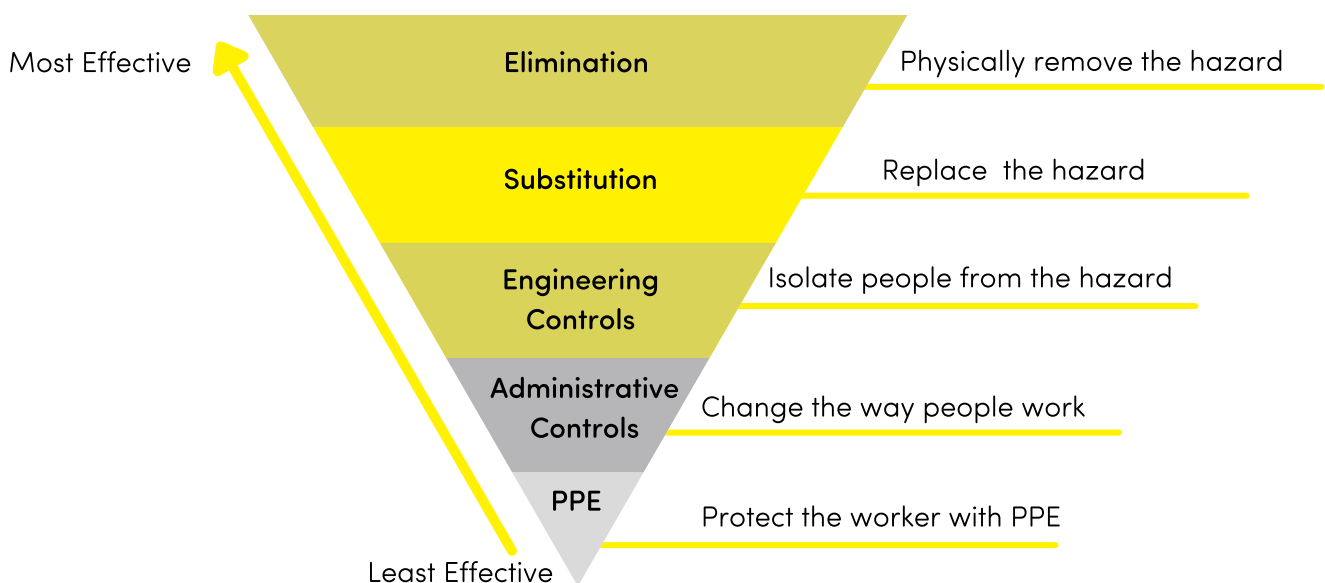


1. Implement a Re-entry Team, lead by the Safety Department.

- Identify key persons or designates in each office who will be responsible for monitoring the workplace. A recommendation is to have a safety representative or member of the Joint Health & Safety Committee involved.
- Have regular team meetings.
- Keep all levels of management informed of changing restrictions that affect the company's return to work plan.

2. Conduct Risk Assessment of the Workplace.

- It is important to identify hazards and use the Hierarchy of Controls to decrease, or if possible, eliminate the risks that may jeopardize the health and safety of workers.



3. Reduce Density to Encourage Physical Distancing of the Workers Onsite at the Same Time.

- Separate desks and workstations (6 ft, 3 m apart).
- Make only certain workstations available. For example, use every other or every third workstation or cubicle.
- Limit the number of people in elevators, stairwells and washrooms.
- Establish an area that could be used for workers needing to immediately isolate if they begin showing symptoms (before they go home).

4. Add Division by Modifying the Floor Plan when Physical Distancing Cannot be Maintained.

- Use temporary partitions or barriers between cubicles or workstations.
- Use of plexiglass in reception areas.
- Remove every second or third chair from board rooms and lunchrooms.
- Establish personal protective equipment (PPE) policies for masks/facial coverings.

5. Identify High Use Touch Points.

- Modify entry to the building/office by using swipe cards.
- Modify latch-based door handles with a door that can easily be pushed open or closed (hands don't touch handles).
- Appliances such as coffee makers and water coolers need to be cleaned after each use.
- Install touchless soap dispensers and touchless taps in washrooms and kitchens.

6. Implement Visual Cues.

- Use signage or display markers to suggest the appropriate distance between employees. For example, markings on floors in entrances to buildings, elevators, offices, and reception areas should be placed to allow for 6 feet of space between individuals.
- Post instructions for cleaning protocols throughout the workplace.
- Provide signage for disposal of personal protective equipment (PPE) – gloves, masks, disinfectant wipes, etc.
- Ensure proper signage for any health screening checkpoints including isolation areas.
- Post signage for mask requirements and where to dispose of used masks.

7. Clean Frequently.

- Have touchless hand sanitizing stations and disinfectant wipes available in several areas in the workplace so they are accessible and available for all employees to use.
- Develop protocols for ongoing cleaning and disinfecting methods and the expected frequency of those cleanings. Communicate these protocols to all employees.

8. Meet in Meeting Spaces.

- Limit in-person interaction and meetings. Use technology instead of face-to-face.
- Limit the number of visitors to the workplace. If this isn't possible ensure adherence to the number of people that can occupy a space.
- Continue to monitor non-essential travel restrictions – provincially and federally.
- Avoid direct contact (i.e. handshaking) when greeting others and be respectful of physical distancing requirements and individual preferences.

9. Protect Employee Safety and Well-Being.

- Employees are counting on their employers to help get them back to work safely and help them to re-acclimatize to the workplace. Employers that lead with empathy and demonstrate an understanding that while all employees experienced the pandemic crisis, it certainly didn't affect employees in the same way. Some employees may feel worried, anxious, and/or fearful about returning to the workplace, while others may be enthusiastic, energized, and excited. It's important to recognize and support all responses.

Employer Best Practices on The First Day Back

- Communicate the return to the workplace plan prior to employees returning. This will help address any concerns and questions that may be raised.
- Provide orientation of all new expectations, protocols, and processes that employees will experience upon returning.
- Encourage open dialogue about how people are feeling and seek to understand individual struggles.
- Encourage employees to share any health issues that may put them at risk if they return to the workplace.
- Continue to reinforce good personal hygiene rules.
- Ensure the Sick/Illness policy includes staying home when ill, when to seek a COVID-19 test, isolating, and the process for returning to work following an illness.
- Communicate expectations for any daily health assessments such as temperature screening, or other symptom checks and the frequency of those requirements.
- Provide ongoing training as processes and procedures change in response to the lifting of restrictions and legislation.



Vaccination Policy

As vaccination delivery programs continue to roll out across Canada, employers should decide how and when to implement a COVID-19 vaccination policy. There is no “one size fits all” policy currently available, so ensure to take time to analyze the context of the policy. Some questions to consider:

- Are there any applicable laws?
- Are there any factors specific to the industry/workplace? (i.e. healthcare workers and construction workers may have more stringent vaccine requirements).
 - What is the nature of the work?
 - Is the environment unionized or non-unionized?
 - Do employees interact with third parties? (i.e. retail workers).
 - Do employees interact with vulnerable populations? (i.e. medically compromised individuals).
- What about balancing the competing legal obligations?
 - Occupational Health & Safety law – duty to ensure a safe workplace
 - Human Rights Laws – duty to accommodate
 - Privacy Laws – obligation to protect employee privacy
- Be clear about whether a COVID-19 vaccination is mandatory or voluntary.
- Explain exactly why a COVID-19 vaccine is essential to your specific workplace if vaccinations are mandatory.
- Provide guidelines for what the proof of vaccine is.
- Encourage and support employees and use the policy as a way to educate them. Provide access to information and resources to educate and answer questions they may have.
- It is important for employers to ensure they are keeping current with the rapidly changing vaccination protocols. Employers should continually monitor reliable sources such as federal and provincial government websites and federal and provincial public health authority websites.
- If vaccinations are optional, ensure employees know you will not tolerate bullying or any calling out of those that are not vaccinated – well-meaning or not. A safe workplace for all is the best workplace.





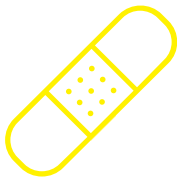
Safe Environment

- Cleaning protocols
- Reduce density for physical distancing
- Use barriers for division of workspaces
- Reduce the number of touchpoints
- Use signage as visual cues throughout the workplace



Employer Responsibilities

- Communicate so employees are prepared and know what to expect
- Provide orientation to re-introduce their workplace
- Ensure sick/illness policy is current and in place
- Consider vaccination policy and procedures
- Support employees who may be experiencing different levels of fear, anxiety, apprehension



Employee Safety

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Definitions

- Remote/Work from Home – also called remote working, telework, teleworking, working from home, WFH, mobile work, remote job, work from anywhere, and flexible workplace is a work arrangement in which employees do not commute or travel to a central place of work.
- Onsite/Office – requiring work to happen where it traditionally takes place such as an office building, warehouse, or store. This usually requires some level of commuting from the employee's residence where they will meet up with others who have similar work or are employed by the same company.
- Hybrid – also called flexible work, is offering an employee the opportunity to work from home and office/central location as per the demands of their role.
- Hybrid Workforce – A hybrid workforce is a type of blended workforce comprising employees who work remotely and those who work from an office or central location.



Return to Office Checklist

As provincial governments release COVID-19 guidelines to begin the gradual return to the workplace, here is a handy checklist to help guide you through the essential steps your business should be implementing.

- Assign an RTO team (including H&S representative).
- Do you understand the current RTO dynamics of your workforce? If not, conduct a quick online survey to understand proactively any resistance and interest to returning to the office. See sample survey questions later in the appendices. Meet with the landlord and other stakeholders to align actions to ensure a safe workplace for all.
- Determine workplace model (100% remote, 100% in office, or hybrid (who and when are they in the office) to be used.
- Review the physical location(s) and assess high traffic areas, common areas, workspaces and ensure appropriate physical distancing and cleaning protocols.
- Communicate RTO plan and date for RTO include key messages revealed in step 2 and H&S measures to minimize reluctance to RTO.
- Purchase cleaning/sanitation products, masks, etc., and create signage as reminders on new practices to ensure new behaviours.
- RTO team walks the workplace day before to ensure everything is ready.
- Welcome workers back on the first day - if it's a staged return ensure everyone feels welcome their first day.
- Create a two-way communication vehicle for employees to voice any safety concerns.
- Revisit your work model regularly to ensure safety protocols are still effective and revise if necessary.
- Communicate with teams on a regular basis as COVID precautions change and provincial restrictions are revised to meet the pandemic threat level.



Sample Return to Office Survey

This survey was developed used by Agilus Work Solutions to determine their RTO plan.

The survey will take approximately 4 minutes to complete.

COVID-19 has re-defined our workplaces. While we follow federal and provincial legislation and guidance (e.g. health/safety, employment and privacy) and are mainly working remotely now – it is important that we think about the future of work in terms of delivering results, individual growth and team cohesion.

This survey gathers information on your role, your team/network, and your preferences.

Some definitions to start with:

- On-site – working in one of our office locations
- Hybrid – working interchangeably in one of our office locations and working remotely
- Remote – working at home

Your perspective is important to us – and we'd like to thank you ahead of time for participating in this survey – we want to know your opinions on the best way forward.

- Agilus has modern offices and there are inspiring moments that can occur on-site. Sightlines across our offices allow people to easily catch a glimpse of one another and see that we're all part of something bigger. Working together can create a vibe, offer informal knowledge-sharing, build on innovative ideas, increase personal profile, and boost camaraderie. What do you find positive, either professionally or personally, about working on-site? Open field
- We are set up in our home offices and there are benefits for focused work and concentration that can occur remotely. We can reassign our commuting time to activities that boost our physical energy (e.g. exercise and recreation) and emotional energy (spending time with family). Employees are enjoying walks and eating healthier (home-cooked food). What do you find positive, either professionally or personally, about working remotely? Open field
- We all have personal preferences as well as professional goals and practicalities to think about. That balance of work+life isn't always straightforward. At this time, we don't know the exact timing for federal or provincial return to office guidelines over the next months. If health and safety, plus government guidance were all positive for a return to our on-site workplaces, how would you rate these options? Please note that you might not have the same answer for both lines – and if there are differences, there is a follow-up question so you can add clarifying information to help us understand:

On-site: 0 days On-site: 1 day On-site: 2 days On-site: 3 days On-site: 4 days On-site: 5 days

Best for my work goal

☐☐☐☐☐☐

My personal preference

☐☐☐☐☐☐

- Please provide more information to help us understand your perspective on on-site, hybrid (working interchangeably between the office and home location) or remote (at home) workdays. Open field

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Sample Return of Office Survey Continued

- How comfortable are you returning to the office from a health and safety perspective – particularly with vaccines and safety protocols (e.g. masks, distancing)?
 - Very comfortable
 - Somewhat comfortable
 - Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable
 - Somewhat uncomfortable
 - Very uncomfortable
- Is there anything further you would like to say on the health and safety aspects of returning to the office?
Open field
- How would you rate these ideas to help us thrive as we interact, think, and work? Please move the items with the most important on top and the least important on the bottom of the list.
 - Define core hours so people can meet, collaborate and find each other for consultation
 - Create guidelines for employees on-site and remote (e.g. dial-in during meetings, so everyone is seen and heard) (on-site and remote)
 - Train on digital technologies and tools for remote work (e.g. collaboration tools)
 - Keep team connections active – through communication (team calls, diverse-team meetings, events); bring people together so we interact as a national team with common goals.
- Pre-COVID most teams were co-located although some teams were distributed in different locations. We have heard of 'distance bias' and that people who work remotely can miss out on career visibility, team discussions, and exposure to wider organizational thinking. What can you do to practically ensure that everyone on your team has the same access to information, updates, and coaching and has a strong presence within the organization – if they are not physically in the same place at the same time? Open field





Useful Health & Safety Websites

BC Centre for Disease Control	http://covid-19.bccdc.ca/
Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety	https://www.ccohs.ca/
Canada Safety Council	https://canadasafetycouncil.org/
Canada's National Workplace Health and Safety	http://www.canoshweb.org/
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)	https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/index.htm
Occupational Health and Safety Administration	https://www.osha.gov/
Public Health Agency of Canada	https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html
Public Safety Canada	https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/index-en.aspx
Government of Canada	https://www.canada.ca/en.html
Federal Occupational Health and Safety Legislation	https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/health-safety/workplace-safety.html
Workplace Safety	

Occupational Health and Safety Provincial Legislation

British Columbia	http://www.worksafebc.com/
Alberta	https://www.alberta.ca/occupational-health-safety.aspx
Saskatchewan	http://www.worksafesask.ca/
Manitoba	http://safemanitoba.com/
Ontario	https://www.canada.ca/en.htm
Quebec	https://www.quebec.ca/en/employment/standards-occupational-health-and-safety/
Nova Scotia	http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/novascotia.ca/lae/healthandsafety/
New Brunswick	http://www.worksafenb.ca/
Prince Edward Island	http://www.wcb.pe.ca/
Newfoundland and Labrador	http://www.workplacenl.ca/
Northwest Territories and Nunavut	http://www.wscc.nt.ca/

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Together we can keep businesses in Canada open!



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