

# Frequently Asked Questions - 2019 COVID-19 (As of March 15, 2020)

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Deputy Heads are accountable for the operations of their department. The following guidance may be subject to modification to ensure that critical services are delivered (for example, certain jobs may not be amenable to telework).

- [General Information](#)
- [Human Resources Issues – Responsibilities and Rights](#)
- [Human Resources Issues – Teleworking](#)
- [Human Resources Issues – Leave and Benefits](#)

## Other Frequently Asked Questions of Interest:

- [2019 COVID-19: Outbreak update](#)
- [Health Canada's GC Intranet website](#)
- [Employment and Social Development Canada Labour Program](#)

## General Information

### Q1. Where can I learn more about 2019 COVID-19?

A1. You can visit [Canada.ca/coronavirus](https://Canada.ca/coronavirus) for more information, including [Frequently Asked Questions](#) about the virus and the Government of Canada's actions. You can also contact the Government of Canada's information line at 1-833-784-4397.

### Q2. What should I do to avoid getting this virus?

A2. Public service employees should follow the advice provided by the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) to the general population.

Employees can play an active role in staying healthy and preventing the spread of COVID-19. Follow these simple steps recommended by the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#):

- wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds;
- avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands;
- avoid close contact with people who are sick;
- cough or sneeze into your sleeve and not your hands; and
- stay home if you are sick to avoid spreading illness to others.

For more information on COVID-19 prevention, consult [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): Outbreak update](#). Health Canada's [Public Service Occupational Health Program](#) is responsible for issuing specific occupational health advice on personal protective measures for public service employees.

### **Q3. Why is so much attention being paid to hand hygiene?**

A3. The [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) has indicated that hand washing with soap and water is the best defense against common infectious diseases. Should soap and water not be readily available, employees should be encouraged to use hand sanitizer. Scent-free hand sanitizers should be available to employees in the workplace when soap and water are not readily available.

### **Q4. Where should employees seek guidance regarding workplace risk of exposure to the COVID-19?**

A4. Employees who are concerned about their health and safety should consult with their manager to discuss their concerns.

## **Responsibilities and Rights**

### **Q5. Who is responsible for employees' occupational health and safety?**

A5. Under the [Canada Labour Code](#) (Code), Part II, the employer (represented by the manager/supervisor) is responsible for the occupational health and safety of his/her employees.

Under the [Code](#), employees also have a role to play to ensure their own occupational health and safety as well as the occupational health and safety of other employees and any person likely to be affected by their acts or omissions. This includes members of the public visiting a federal workplace.

[Employment and Social Development Canada](#)'s Labour Program created a brochure, [Pamphlet 2A - Employer and Employee Duties](#), which outlines the duties of both the employer and employees under the Code.

### **Q6. How is the Government of Canada working to protect its employees?**

A6. The Government of Canada is providing information to its employees on how to protect themselves against COVID-19 including general public health information provided by the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) and Occupational Health and Safety Advisories issued by [Health Canada's Public Service Occupational Health Program](#). Individual federal public service

organizations are responsible for providing specific information to their own employees to address unique organizational circumstances.

### **Q7. What is the Government doing to protect employees working and travelling abroad?**

A7. Please visit [2019 novel coronavirus: Latest travel advice](#) for up-to-date travel information on areas where non-essential travel should be avoided or others where all travel should be avoided. If you have travel concerns, you should discuss these with your manager.

## **Manager Responsibilities**

### **Q8. As a manager, what are my responsibilities in the context of COVID-19?**

A8. Managers are responsible at all times, both by policy and by law, to provide their employees with a healthy and safe work environment. In the context of COVID-19, managers must remain informed of orders, directions and guidance issued by the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#), [Health Canada](#) and from their own organizations. They also have the duty to inform their employees of these orders, directions and guidance.

Managers can obtain advice from their Departmental Occupational Health and Safety Coordinator regarding health and safety processes and procedures but, at a minimum, must familiarize themselves with their responsibilities in dealing with an employee's [right to refuse dangerous work](#), and/or [health and safety complaint](#). These processes are set out in the [Canada Labour Code](#) and are explained on the [Employment and Social Development Canada](#) webpage on [occupational health and safety](#).

Managers can also consult the [Manager's Handbook Canada Labour Code Part II](#), developed to assist them in interpreting and implementing the requirements of Part II of the [Canada Labour Code](#).

### **Q9 (Updated). How do managers/supervisors address the anxiety that some employees may be experiencing?**

A9: Under circumstances such as these, it is natural to experience different levels of anxiety. Employees may wish to speak to their manager/supervisor, who will be able to advise them on what services are available to help them via the 24-7 [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP) or your [departmental coordinator](#), accessing care through the [Public Service Healthcare Plan](#) (PSHP) or using the nationwide [Specialized Organizational Services](#) (SOS).

## Employee Responsibilities

### Q10. As an employee, what are my responsibilities in the context of COVID-19?

A10. Employees have the responsibility to inform themselves by consulting information provided by health authorities and by their employer, such as [2019 novel coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Outbreak update](#) . They are responsible for following their management's directions regarding reporting to work and workplace health procedures in the context of the COVID-19.

Section 126 of the [Canada Labour Code](#) outlines reasonable expectations for all employees **regardless of their position in the organization**. Employees' duties include, among others:

- Using safety equipment provided to them;
- Complying with all instructions from the employer concerning the health and safety of employees; and
- Cooperating with any person carrying out a duty set out in the [Code](#).

While at work, employees must also report to the employer anything or circumstance in a workplace that is likely to be hazardous to the health or safety of employees or other persons granted access to the workplace by the employer.

To avoid spreading the virus to colleagues and clients, employees who have symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, and difficulty breathing) have a duty to stay at home as long as they present symptoms or as long as directed by their doctors.

### Q11. What are my rights as an employee?

A11. Employees have specific rights related to working conditions and leave provisions that are outlined in [collective agreements](#) and The Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) policies. If employees require assistance in understanding these provisions, they should talk to their manager/supervisor or their union representative.

In addition, employees have three specific rights stemming from the [Canada Labour Code](#), Part II, in relation to their health and safety in the workplace:

- the right to know;
- the right to participate; and
- the right to refuse dangerous work.

[Employment and Social Development Canada](#)'s Labour Program created a brochure, [Pamphlet 1 – Summary Health and Safety](#), which contains general information on the [Code](#), Part II. The three rights mentioned above are explained in this brochure.

## **Q12. Am I expected to report to work in the context of COVID-19?**

A12. The health, safety and well-being of federal public service employees across the country are of the highest importance to the Government of Canada. Federal employees will be expected to report to work unless advised otherwise by their management based on the advice of health authorities. It is the manager's discretion to consider requests for alternative working arrangements subject to operational requirements.

If you have travelled abroad, please consult the [Novel Coronavirus infection: Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\)](#) page for the latest advice from health authorities.

## **Q13. Do I have the right to refuse to work for health and safety reasons?**

A13. Under the [Canada Labour Code](#), employees have the right to refuse to do a job if there is reasonable cause to believe that the job presents a danger to themselves or another employee. Employees must be at work in order to legitimately refuse to work.

Part II of the [Code](#), which deals with health and safety in the workplace, sets out [steps](#) for an employee to follow. [Employment and Social Development Canada](#)'s Labour Program created a brochure, [Pamphlet 4 – Right to Refuse Dangerous Work](#) that explains the process.

## **Q14. Do I have the right to refuse to attend meetings and other workplace gatherings if I suspect that I could risk being contaminated with COVID-19?**

A14. Employees are responsible for following their management's directions regarding reporting to work and workplace health procedures in the context of COVID-19. Managers can consider alternatives to meetings and gatherings such as teleconferencing. Notwithstanding, under the [Canada Labour Code](#), employees have the right (with some exceptions) to refuse to do a job if there is reasonable cause to believe that the job presents a danger to themselves or another employee. (Refer to Q13 above). Health authorities are reviewing instructions related to mass gatherings.

## **Q15. What can I do if my work involves contact with clients?**

A15. Given the evolving status of this disease outbreak, please refer to the following links for up-to-date information:

- GCintranet. <https://intranet.canada.ca/psc-fsc/messages/cmt-538-eng.asp> (accessible only from a Government of Canada device)
- Government of Canada. [Canada.ca/coronavirus](https://Canada.ca/coronavirus)

**Q16. Does an employee have a duty to report to management if they have COVID-19 in the workplace?**

A16. If the employee is in the workplace and has COVID-19, under the Canada Labour Code, this would constitute a workplace hazard. As such, the employee has a duty to report this hazard to management.

**Q17. What do I do if I think a client is ill?**

A17. You should bring this to the attention of your supervisor/manager, who will decide on the best way to provide the service to the client, such as via Internet, telephone, mail or increased social distancing.

Health authorities will continue to provide advice on appropriate measures to take to protect the health of employees and to stop the spread of the virus.

**Q18. We have employees who have recently returned to work from travel to areas of higher risk of COVID-19, and colleagues are concerned about exposure. What should we do?**

A18. If employees have travelled outside Canada, they may have come in contact with the COVID-19. Please refer to the following websites for the most up-to-date information:

- GCintranet. <https://intranet.canada.ca/psc-fsc/messages/cmt-538-eng.asp> (accessible only from a Government of Canada device)
- Government of Canada. [Canada.ca/coronavirus](https://Canada.ca/coronavirus)

**Q19. I am experiencing anxiety about COVID-19. What can I do?**

A19. Under circumstances such as these, it is natural to experience anxiety. Employees may wish to speak to their manager/supervisor, who will be able to advise them on what services are available to help employees, including programs such as the Employee Assistance Program. Alternative work arrangements where possible can also help alleviate anxiety.

**Q20. What is the planned course of action on the use of personal protective equipment such as masks and gloves?**

A20. For up to date information, please follow Health Canada's Public Service Occupational Health Program's advisories which can be found <https://intranet.canada.ca/psc-fsc/messages/cmt-538-eng.asp>

For more information, please consult [Information - Public Health Agency of Canada Recommendations on use of Masks in Public Settings to Prevent Transmission of COVID-19 \(2019 Novel Coronavirus\)](#).

**Q21. How will the employer promote consistency in the use of personal protective equipment, such as masks and gloves, across government?**

A21. Deputy Heads, in consultation with the departmental health and safety policy committee, will conduct their risk assessments, taking into first consideration the advice from the [Public Health Agency of Canada\(Canada.ca/coronavirus\)](https://www.canada.ca/coronavirus) , and [Health Canada's Public Service Occupational Health Program \(https://intranet.canada.ca/psc-fsc/messages/cmt-538-eng.asp\)](https://intranet.canada.ca/psc-fsc/messages/cmt-538-eng.asp), including risk mitigation strategies.

**Q22. What if an employee insists on wearing a mask as a precaution against contracting COVID-19 contrary to the evidence-based advice from the health authorities?**

A22. In order for management to carry out a proper risk analysis, dialogue and information sharing will be essential so that interested parties share up-to-date facts as well as any pertinent factors based on activities carried out by an employee.

Should an employee continue to wear a mask in spite of the latest health advice and contrary to management's risk analysis, management should make an effort to discuss and inform the employee as to the possible negative impacts. For example, some may use masks incorrectly, or contaminate themselves when putting masks on and taking them off, which could actually increase the risk of infection.

As the health advice does not support the use of masks (except in limited circumstances), the employee should understand that the mask is not a work requirement. If the employee still refuses to remove the mask, the manager should discuss further with his or her human resources advisor. To address an employee's underlying concerns, options such as reassignment or telework may be considered based on operational requirements.

**Q23. Should I avoid public transportation if I am not ill?**

A23. There is currently no public health advice recommending that individuals should avoid using public transportation. An employee who has such concerns remains responsible for making arrangements for getting to and from work.

**Teleworking**

**Q24 (Updated).Can I decide to work from home to avoid getting sick, or while in self-isolation?**

A24. Employees are encouraged to use telework and alternative work arrangements as operational requirements and circumstances permit. The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Shared Services Canada and departmental Chief Information Officers have been

working together to maximize internet bandwidth to support remote work and prioritize network access tied to critical operations.

To help our workforce maximize productivity individually and collectively, please:

- Use mobile devices whenever possible to send and receive emails;
- Connect to VPN/SRA get what you need from the corporate network and disconnect, which allows for others to do the same;
- Limit the use of video conferencing on the GC network when audio conferencing will suffice;
- Localize any files before leaving the office; and
- Download documents outside normal business hours.

Further, tips to maximize collaboration within and across teams, include:

- Use public cloud services to collaborate with colleagues, for Unclassified work (examples: Facetime, MS Teams, Google HangOuts, Slack, etc.); and
- Use the BBMe application to communicate with colleagues, for up to Protected B work.

Managers and employees are responsible for ensuring that the operational needs of the organization are met.

### **Q25 (Updated). I want to work from home but am not set up to do so. What do I do?**

A25. Managers are expected to consider telework for their employees and should work with them to identify an approach that is as flexible as possible while ensuring continued critical Government operations and services to Canadians.

Telework should be considered first, and, consistent with deputy head accountabilities, departments and agencies are asked to determine how best to manage through exceptional situations (critical services requiring on-site presence; security limitations; or other operational imperatives for which no reasonable alternative can be considered) that do not lend themselves to telework.

### **Q26. Can I work on sensitive / protected / classified information from home?**

A26. Employees are responsible for safeguarding personal or sensitive information outside the workplace. Departments and agencies should assist employees with the aspects of safe custody and control of sensitive information, and make the necessary arrangements for employees to meet their obligations, when working away from the designated workplace. For more information, please consult your departmental security office.

**Q27. Will teleworking arrangements be made for all employees who provide critical services?**

A27. No, as some functions cannot be fulfilled from a location other than a designated workplace. This is why an employee's manager will review any request to telework.

**Leave Requests and Benefits**

**Q28. Can I apply for leave with pay for family-related responsibilities if a family member becomes ill with COVID-19?**

A28. Each employee's situation should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and open communication with your manager is encouraged. Granting leave with pay for family-related responsibilities is subject to management's approval and conditional to the applicable provisions of the employee's collective agreement or terms and conditions of employment for an unrepresented employee.

**Q29 (Updated). Are there any situations where leave with or without pay for "other reasons" might be approved in the context of COVID-19?**

A29. In the context of COVID-19, there are two situations where leave with pay for other reasons can be granted.

A) Employees that are required by public health officials to self-isolate.

- If in good health and able to work, employees will be asked to discuss with their managers, the option to telework.
- If that is not possible, the employees will be granted "other leave with pay (699 code)" as per the applicable collective agreement.
- Individual cases may have to be examined on their own merits (i.e. if an employee willingly chose to travel to affected areas contrary to public health advice.)

B) Employees whose children cannot attend school or daycare due to a closure or because of attendance restrictions in place in relation to the coronavirus situation.

Employees will:

- Attempt to make alternative care arrangements.
- If that is not possible, they discuss with their managers, the option to telework.
- If that is not possible, they will be granted "other leave with pay" (699 code).

Deputy Heads are accountable for the operations of their department. The above guidance may have to be modified in order ensure that critical services are delivered. Certain jobs may not be amenable to telework.

**Q30 (Updated). Will changes be made to the Public Service Health Care Plan in response to COVID-19?**

A30. No changes are planned specifically in relation to COVID-19.

**Business Continuity Planning Management**

**Q31. What is the Government doing to minimize disruptions to its operations in the context of COVID-19?**

A31. Business Continuity Management is conducted systematically and comprehensively to provide reasonable assurance that continuity of government operations can be maintained during situations that may disrupt normal operations and that the Government of Canada can maintain the delivery of critical programs and services. The [Policy on Government Security](#) identifies the requirements for federal departments and agencies to establish business continuity plans.

**Q32. What is a business continuity plan?**

A32. Federal institutions must establish business continuity plans outlining how a federal institution will address a disruption and maintain an acceptable level of delivery of critical services or activities.

A business continuity plan consists of documented procedures to guide a department or agency to respond, recover, resume and restore a pre-defined level of (critical) service delivery following a disruption.

**Q33. Where can I find out more about my department's business continuity plan?**

A34. Your Departmental Chief Security Officer would have the most current information on your department's business continuity plan.

The [Policy on Government Security](#) calls upon departments to maintain processes and timelines for review and maintenance of business continuity plans, measures and arrangements, the provision of training, the testing of plans as well as the application of corrective action based on the results of tests.

**Q34. How will federal departments and agencies keep bargaining agents informed?**

A34. Departments are encouraged to discuss business continuity planning and pandemic planning at their Departmental Labour Management Consultation Committees, and, if appropriate, at Departmental Occupational Health and Safety Policy Committees to ensure that employees receive regular updates on planning through their bargaining agent. The Treasury Board is communicating and engaging the bargaining agents at the national level through the [National Joint Council](#). Technical briefings are held on a regular basis.