Event Planning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

This tip sheet will help employers, workers, and attendees protect themselves and others from COVID-19 when planning gatherings or events.

In all cases, guidance from local public health authorities must be followed and general COVID-19 prevention practices should be implemented, as outlined in:
https://www.ccohs.ca/pdfs/covid-general.pdf.

Consider the Risks Associated with Your Gathering or Event

Participating in gatherings may involve close contact with other people and frequently touched surfaces. The chance of COVID-19 spreading at these events depends on the number and characteristics of attendees (e.g., age, maturity, physical ability, comprehension) , proximity and durations of interactions between attendees, and the measures put in place by employers to reduce risk of virus spread.

Each small gathering or event may have unique situations. Assess the risk for each activity and interaction separately. Consider the following:

- What activities will your workers do? Examples: screening, reception and customer service, set up and take down of tables and chairs, preparing or serving food, cleaning and disinfecting, etc.
- Who will attend the event? Is it only for a group of people who regularly have contact (such as a group of workers), or is it offered to others (i.e., family and friends, or people from outside these groups)?
- How many people will attend the event?
- Is the event scheduled for a limited number of pre-registered attendees or can attendees drop in?
- Will attendees have close contact (i.e., within 2 metres) with one another?
- Will attendees have prolonged or cumulative interactions with others?
- Will attendees have contact with high-touch surfaces or shared items (e.g., washrooms, door handles, service counters, electronic equipment, etc.)?
- Can extra equipment be moved or removed from the area?
- What activities will be offered? Do they involve loud verbal instructions and music (shouting, yelling, singing)?
- Are food and beverages being served?
- How long will the event last? (i.e. the longer the length of time, the higher the risk).
- Will the event be indoors or outdoors? Will it be held at one or multiple locations?
- Does the size of the facility allow for physical distancing measures?

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Communication

- Inform all workers and attendees in advance about any measures that are in place. This information can be shared online, through advertisements, with notices at the front doors, and verbally by staff.
- Help attendees understand that protective measures and reduced services are necessary, and that their event experience might be different. Ask them to be considerate of workers and other attendees.
- Make sure that all communications are suitable for people's age, ability, reading level, and language preferences.
- Ask attendees to arrive no more than 15 minutes before event start time and to leave promptly afterward.
- Post signs throughout the facility to encourage physical distancing, cleaning and disinfecting of equipment, hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette.
- Consider a website or phone-based advanced booking system to help manage the number of attendees on site and to reduce waiting.
- Send any necessary forms, waivers, etc. electronically.
- Notify workers and attendees of closures of any event or amenities (e.g., restricted access to building, washrooms, lockers etc.).
- Record the names and contact information of all workers and attendees in the facility to assist with contact tracing if needed. Make sure that privacy is protected, and the list is only used for contact tracing purposes.

Screening

- Post signs for workers and attendees not to enter the event if they may be sick, have been exposed to someone sick, or have just returned to Canada.
- Consider asking screening questions before workers and attendees enter using a checklist from your local public health authority or have them complete a questionnaire.
- Anyone who does not pass screening should be advised that they should not enter the facilities and should wear a mask, self-isolate, call their health care provider and local public health authority.
- Establish procedures for people that become ill while at the event. Ensure that any symptoms are reported immediately. Make sure they immediately wear a mask if not already doing so (preferably a surgical mask if available) and remain isolated from others until they can safely return home or be sent for medical attention. Consult with your local public health authority for guidance on next steps.

Physical Distancing

- Do not exceed the maximum gathering and event limits for your jurisdiction.
- Set occupancy limits for the event to allow available room for spacing people at least 2 meters apart.
- Host smaller events in larger spaces where possible.
- Elevator occupancy should be limited to allow for physical distancing to be maintained.
- Consider limiting any non-essential visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations at the same time the event is taking place.
- Consider staggered times for workers and attendees to arrive to the event.

Engineering Controls

- Install physical barriers, floor markings and other visual cues where needed including at elevators and escalators if available.

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- Ensure that guests can access their event without wandering (i.e., entering other rooms or areas) and, if possible, use a dedicated entrance and exit that are automated. Prop open doors where possible but do not create a fire safety issue by doing so.
- Establish one-way routes where appropriate within the facility to include access to washrooms.
- Rearrange and limit the use of seating areas, common areas, main lobbies, washrooms, etc. For example, block off some washroom stalls.
- Change seating layout or availability of seating so that people can remain least 2 metres (6 feet) apart. Block off rows or sections of seating in order to promote distancing.

Ventilation

- Ensure that ventilation systems of indoor spaces operate properly.
- Increase introduction and circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, or other methods. However, do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety risk to workers or attendees.
- Powerful portable cooling fans might increase the spread of COVID-19 in enclosed spaces. Use other ways to keep rooms cool, such as adjusting building ventilation systems, and air conditioning units.
- Ventilation systems should be adjusted to:
  - Increase filtration efficiency to the highest level appropriate for the system.
  - Increase fresh air flow/percentage of outdoor air (increase % of outdoor air in HVAC air supply, open windows and doors, etc.).
  - Limit use of demand-controlled ventilation; keep system running at the optimal setting.
  - Explore the use of portable high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filtration units.
- Consult an HVAC professional before making changes to the ventilation system.

Administrative Controls

- Attendees should be permitted only for the duration of the event and leave promptly when the event is over.
- Prioritize outdoor activities where physical distancing can be maintained as much as possible.
- If providing portable toilets, also provide portable handwashing stations and ensure that they remain stocked throughout the duration of the event.
- If possible, provide hand sanitizer stations that are touch-free.
- Ensure the event is adequately stocked with supplies for handwashing, including soap and water or hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol (for staff and older children who can safely use hand sanitizer), paper towels, tissues, and no-touch trash cans.
- Shut off water fountains or replace them with water bottle refill stations. Each person should have their own labelled water bottle.
- Remind guests and servers to clean their hands before getting food or drinks.
- If food and/or drinks are being served, consider that people congregating around food service areas can pose a risk.
- If a cafeteria or group dining room is used, serve individually plated meals or grab-and-go options, and hold activities in separate areas.
- Do not serve food or drinks as self-serve or buffet style – provide individual plates or have the food served by workers to limit sharing of serving utensils. Consider having pre-packaged boxes or bags for each attendee.
- Limit the number of people serving and have servers wear a non-medical mask or face covering.

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- Use disposable dishes and cutlery. If disposable items are not feasible or desirable, ensure that all food service items are handled with clean hands (as directed by public health authority) and washed with dish soap and hot water or in a dishwasher.
- Alternatively, ask guests to bring their own food and drinks and avoid sharing snack bowls.
- Individuals should wash their hands before putting on and after removing their gloves or after directly handling used food service items.
- Follow all food safety precautions related to temperature and storage of hot and cold foods.
- Discard any uneaten open, thawed, prepared, cooked, or ready-to-eat foods (i.e. do not keep/share leftovers).
- Encourage attendees to remain seated when eating or drinking except while:
    - Entering or exiting the area or while moving to their table,
    - Placing, picking up, or paying for an order,
    - Going to or returning from a washroom,
    - Lining up to do anything described above, or
    - Where necessary for the purpose of health and safety
- Discourage singing, yelling, and chanting.
- Discourage unnecessary physical contact such as hugs, handshakes and high fives.
- Consider additional measures to protect workers and attendees who are at risk for more severe disease or outcomes from COVID-19, such as offering online attendance options.

Personal Hygiene

- Hand wash and sanitizer stations should be well stocked and easy to find near the entrance and other appropriate areas (e.g., tables, podiums, etc.). Make sure they are accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Everyone should perform hand hygiene when entering and leaving the event, after using washrooms, before and after eating and drinking, before and after touching shared equipment and surfaces, and after contact with another person.
- Encourage good respiratory etiquette. Staff and attendees should sneeze or cough into a tissue or into the bend of your arm, instead of their hands.
- Encourage use of tissues and other means to prevent the spread of bodily fluids. Everyone should immediately dispose of used tissues in lined garbage cans and follow-up with hand hygiene.
- Staff and attendees should avoid sharing items as much as possible, especially those that are difficult to clean, sanitize, or disinfect.
- Limit use of equipment to one group of users at a time. Clean and disinfect between use.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

- Develop a cleaning and disinfection program with a schedule and checklists for all areas and equipment.
- Increase the frequency of routine cleaning and disinfecting. before, during and after the event.
- Clean and disinfect shared work areas, facilities, furniture and equipment between users or events.
- Focus on high-touch surfaces and objects such as doors, counters, chairs, handles, railings, lounge chairs, table tops, debit machines and ATMs, touchscreens, phones, light switches, faucets, taps, sanitizer dispensers, diaper-changing stations, water bottle refill stations, elevators, and any protective barriers.
- Discourage the sharing of items that are difficult to clean, sanitize or disinfect. Remove soft furnishings and objects that cannot be easily cleaned (e.g. magazines, newspapers).

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- Place cleaning supplies and lined garbage cans where it is accessible to workers during the event.
- Consider using disposable paper or plastic tablecloths and serviettes to minimize exposure to contamination.
- If the event generates laundry, do not shake dirty laundry. Use disposable gloves and perform hand hygiene after handling laundry. Clean and disinfect hampers and bins.
- Use a household or commercial disinfectant to destroy or inactivate the virus.
    - Use a disinfectant with a drug identification number (DIN). This number means that it has been approved for use in Canada.
    - Read and follow manufacturer's instructions for the safe use of products (E.g., wear gloves, use in well-ventilated area, allow enough contact time for disinfectant to kill germs based on the product being used).
    - If approved household or commercial disinfectant products are not available, hard surfaces can be disinfected using a mixture of 5 mL of bleach (5% sodium hypochlorite) and 250 mL of water. Test surfaces before using a bleach solution. Bleach can be corrosive. Follow instructions for safe handling of bleach.
    - If the use of liquids can be withstood, disinfect high-touch electronic devices (e.g., touch screens, pin pads, keyboards) with alcohol or disinfectant wipes.
- Clean so that when the surface is wiped, the surface still appears wet.
- Provide workers with training on cleaning and disinfecting procedures, adequate supplies, and access to required personal protective equipment. Check the product's safety data sheet or label for safe use instructions.
- Use dedicated re-useable cleaning materials (towels, sponges, mops, etc.) that can be washed using laundry soap and then dried completely.
- Dispose of single-use tissues, wipes, gloves, and other cleaning materials in a plastic lined waste container. Empty garbage at least daily. Use disposable gloves when handling garbage.
- Replace garbage bins with no-touch receptacles or remove lids that require contact to open.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Continue to use PPE for existing occupational safety hazards and emergencies as directed by applicable laws and your employer.
- Situations where PPE may be considered for protection from COVID-19 include:
    - Wearing gloves when cleaning as recommended by the product's safe work instructions or safety data sheet.
    - Wearing disposable gloves when cleaning blood or body fluids in the event an ill individual requires direct contact (i.e. for emergency first aid)
- If workers need to wear PPE, train them on how to wear, remove, work with, and care for the equipment, and to understand its limitations.
- Clean and disinfect any shared PPE before you wear it.
- Wash hands before wearing and after removing PPE.

Non-Medical Masks or Face Coverings

- The wearing of non-medical masks or cloth face coverings is an additional personal practice that can help to prevent the infectious respiratory droplets of an unknowingly infected person from encountering other people. Continue to follow other public health measures, including a layered approach, to reduce chances of becoming ill.
- Follow the mask recommendations as issued by your public health or other authority. Understand that

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people may choose to wear masks regardless if there is a formal requirement.

- Masks are to be worn during the event when physical distancing cannot be maintained and removed only when eating or drinking.
- A mask should not be worn by anyone who is unable to remove it without assistance (e.g., due to their age or ability).
- Masks should be worn correctly, making sure the nose and mouth are covered. Ensure employees and attendees do not touch their mask while wearing it.
- Be aware that non-medical masks have limitations, and improper mask use and disposal can increase the risk of infection.
- Employees and attendees should change their mask if it becomes wet or soiled. They may wish to bring a second mask in a clean paper bag, envelope, or container that does not trap moisture. Reusable soiled masks should be stored in a separate bag or container. Staff and attendees should be reminded to not touch the outside of the mask while removing it and to wash their hands when they are finished.
- For some situations, not being able to see the person's face and mouth clearly may cause difficulties. Consider using a transparent mask if appropriate.
- Persons exerting themselves during activities such as dancing may not be able to wear a mask. Consider prohibiting such activities or ensuring physical distancing can be followed.
- For participants cannot wear a mask for medical reasons, offer service accommodation such as providing service outside of the facility, with a mobile keypad, or through a window. Persons with a disability are not required to provide written proof that they cannot wear a mask; however, you also have the right to provide service in different ways to both accommodate their medical needs and protect your employees. Employees who may have health-related concerns associated with wearing a mask and should get guidance from their healthcare provider.
- Know the differences between respirators, surgical masks and non-medical masks and when to use.
- Do not allow the mask to be a hazard when performing other tasks or activities, such as getting caught in moving machinery or equipment.

External Service Providers

- For visits by external services such as security, deliveries, food preparers, contractors, and others:
    - Communicate with service providers about your COVID-19 safety requirements before their visit, and work with them to meet their safety requirements.
    - Maintain physical distancing as much as possible, minimize exposure to workers and attendees, wear non-medical masks, and provide hand washing facilities.
    - Clean and disinfect the work area before and after the service provider does their work.

Human Resources

- Notify employees in advance if there are changes to screening measures and policies.
- Set a clear policy for what is expected of employees if they get sick, have symptoms, receive a positive COVID-19 test result, or if an exposure is reported involving a co-worker or event attendee.
- On arrival each day, check-in and assess all employees using screening criteria from your local public health authority.
- Minimize contact during sign-in. Have the supervisor sign in for people (or provide separate pens), or have people text the supervisor. Clean any sign-in devices between users.
- Adjust employee schedules to reflect any necessary changes.
- If there are fewer employees available, make sure essential roles such as trained supervision, and first aid or emergency response persons are still present.

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- Encourage employees to only work at one location and assign cohort groups of workers to the same shifts every week if possible.
- Make sure employees are trained to work safely, including when replacing the duties of others.
- Submit documents electronically, or wash hands after handling papers.
- Stagger meetings, breaks, mealtimes, and orientations.
- Use videoconferencing or teleconferencing when possible for work-related meetings and gatherings.
- Cancel, adjust, or postpone large work-related meetings or gatherings that can only occur in-person in accordance with state and local regulations and guidance.
- When videoconferencing or teleconferencing is not possible, hold meetings in open, well-ventilated spaces or outside continuing to maintain 6 feet apart and wear cloth face coverings.
- Hold verbal or electronic orientations.
- Remove communal coat check areas and shared footwear or clothing. Allow workers to store their personal items separately or in sealed bins or bags if they do not have lockers.

For further information on COVID-19, refer to the Public Health Agency of Canada

https://www.canada.ca/coronavirus

Note that this guidance is just some of the adjustments organizations can make during a pandemic. Adapt this list by adding your own good practices and policies to meet your organization's specific needs.