

# Communicable Disease Prevention

## A GUIDE FOR NEW BRUNSWICK EMPLOYERS

*This guide is not meant for workplaces that have an existing infection prevention and control (IPC) plan related to communicable disease, such as health care authorities and long-term care facilities.*

While COVID-19 vaccinations have become widely available, the risk of transmission and its serious consequences continues. We must help protect workers from COVID-19 as well as other communicable diseases.

This guide provides information for employers to develop a communicable disease plan. An effective plan includes ongoing measures to reduce the risk of communicable disease and additional measures for when there's an elevated risk of communicable disease.

Mitigating communicable disease at your workplace is part of an effective occupational health and safety program.

**A communicable disease is an illness caused by an infectious agent or its toxic product that can be transmitted in a workplace from one person to another. Examples of communicable diseases that may circulate in a workplace include COVID-19, norovirus and seasonal influenza.**

### Communicable Disease Prevention Plan

As an employer, you're obligated under the *Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act* (see [Section 9\(1\)\(a\)](#)) to take every reasonable precaution to ensure the health and safety of your employees. This includes prevention efforts to eliminate or minimize the risk of transmission of communicable disease in your workplace.

This guide describes a four-step process to help you develop a **communicable disease prevention plan** (the "plan"). As with all other workplace hazards, you must assess the risk of a communicable disease and develop appropriate measures for your workplace.

It is important to note that WorkSafeNB may require a written plan depending on the circumstances observed during inspections and investigations. Pre-approval of your measures by WorkSafeNB is not required, however a WorkSafeNB officer could ask you to describe communicable disease prevention measures in place during a workplace inspection.



The documented plan can also help you communicate measures easily to staff and visitors.

**All employers must mitigate the spread of communicable disease.** Employers with 20 or more employees should include mitigation measures in their occupational health and safety program. Small employers (fewer than 20 employees) should do this with a policy or procedure if they do not have a health and safety program.

When developing the plan, always consult with your joint health and safety committee (JHSC) or health and safety representative (or, in smaller workplaces, other workers).

### Building your Communicable Disease Prevention Plan

#### Step 1: Assess the risk

Preventing communicable disease spread requires assessing the risk for communicable disease transmission in the workplace.

The risk of certain communicable diseases, including COVID-19, may increase from time to time or seasonally. This may occur at a local or regional level, or within a certain workplace.

- ❑ Designate a competent person to monitor and assess communicable disease-related information issued by New Brunswick's Chief (or regional) Medical Officer of Health or WorkSafeNB and determine the impact and risk to your workplace. This information could include orders, guidance, advice or recommendations.

□ The risk level at each workplace differs due to various job roles, workplace population, job tasks, staff vaccination rates, access by the public and workspace. Review your risk of communicable diseases by evaluating:

- how likely it is that workers could come into contact with people who have the virus including other workers, suppliers, clients and customers;
- workspace layout;
- business type and the services you provide;
- how workers perform their job duties;
- workers who may be more vulnerable to the effects of a communicable disease;
- percentage of staff vaccinated against communicable diseases such as COVID-19 and influenza (if known).

To support your efforts to maintain a healthy workforce, refer to the [Public Health Agency of Canada's table for recommended protective measures](#) based on level of risk and vaccination status and [Reducing COVID-19 risk in community settings: A tool for operators](#).

## Step 2: Implement measures, practices, and policies to mitigate the risk

Preventing communicable disease involves ongoing measures to reduce the risk for communicable disease transmission in the workplace. It also involves implementing additional measures when directed to do so by Public Health or during periods of elevated risk.

Some employees may have fears and anxieties about health risks in the workplace. Limit unnecessary exposure to respiratory viruses by implementing both required and optional measures.

### REQUIRED AT ALL TIMES

- Provide hand-hygiene facilities with appropriate supplies. This includes providing hand-sanitizing supplies when facilities with running water are not readily available. Use signage and policies to remind people to wash their hands regularly and to cover coughs and sneezes. (See [section 6 of Regulation 91-191](#).)
- Ensure your building [ventilation](#) is adequate and ventilation systems are maintained and

functioning as designed. (See [section 20 of Regulation 91-191](#).)

- Implement measures as directed by Public Health. During a period of elevated risk, Public Health may provide additional directives to workplaces about communicable disease. The measures you must implement will depend on the type of disease and the methods of transmission.
- Consult your JHSC, health and safety representative or other workers on required and recommended measures to be included in your communicable disease plan.

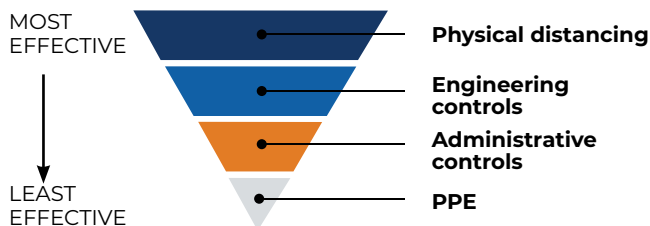
### MEASURES TO CONSIDER (DEPENDING ON YOUR WORKPLACE RISK ASSESSMENT)

- Establish a cleaning schedule to maintain a healthy and safe environment in your workplace. Ensure cleaning and disinfecting products are in accessible areas to encourage workers and patrons to self-clean and disinfect (examples: near shared equipment, shopping carts and common spaces like meeting rooms and lunch rooms).
- Foster a non-discriminatory atmosphere where employees and patrons feel comfortable and welcome to wear a non-medical mask and to keep their distance from others. There will be people who will not be fully vaccinated, for whatever reason. It is important to ensure they are not stigmatized. There will also be fully vaccinated people whose immune systems may not wage a strong defence due to illness, age or medical treatment. These employees may choose to use additional layers of protection every day, or when conditions indicate increased COVID-19 (or other communicable disease) activity in their area.
- Encourage employees to be vaccinated for COVID-19 and other vaccine-preventable conditions. This may include connecting employees with reliable information about COVID-19 vaccines as well as the benefits of vaccination against seasonal influenza. We encourage you to provide time during the workday, if required, to allow employees to get their communicable disease vaccinations.
- Develop policies and educate staff on those policies to support workers who have symptoms of a communicable disease (examples: fever, chills, coughing) so they can avoid being at the workplace when sick and encourage them to [get tested](#) if they have COVID-19 symptoms.

- ❑ Use protective barriers. plexiglass and sneeze guard barriers limit employee and patron exposure to all communicable diseases and will provide ongoing protection for people not vaccinated or vulnerable employees and patrons.
- ❑ Post signage (or use other passive screening tools) at entrances to discourage employees and patrons from entering the establishment when sick. Tools should also encourage them to get tested when two or more symptoms of COVID-19 develop and to stay home until well.
- ❑ Use directional signage to indicate traffic flow and separate entrances and exits to avoid congregation in one area.
- ❑ If eligible for the program, use [rapid point of care testing](#) of employees in the workplace for early detection of outbreaks.

## DETERMINING MOST EFFECTIVE MEASURES FOR MITIGATING RISK IN YOUR WORKPLACE

Fostering a healthy environment will look different from workplace to workplace. Whenever you have more than one option for controlling a risk, consider this hierarchy of controls chart. Physical distancing is always the most effective control, then engineering controls, and so on.



**Physical distancing:** Consider restructuring physical settings and responsibilities to adhere to a respectful distance between people (examples: have space for staff and customers to distance themselves if they choose). In addition, wherever possible, encourage people to work or access businesses from home when sick (or wear a mask until COVID-19 is ruled out or not suspected).

**Engineering controls:** Consider physical barriers between people when distancing is not possible; consider ventilation when redesigning spaces.

**Administrative controls:** Redistribute responsibilities to reduce contact between individuals; use technology to facilitate communication.

**Personal protective equipment (PPE) and non-medical masks:** Wear medical PPE when required in health care settings and community face masks in public settings. Encourage employees to keep a face mask close at hand for times when risks are elevated or unknown.

### SAFE WORK TRAVEL

- ❑ Recommend staff be fully vaccinated before travelling, whenever possible.
- ❑ Before travel, consider what is an acceptable travel risk.
- ❑ When travelling to a high-risk destination is necessary, adopt as many protective measures as possible.
- ❑ Be prepared. Know in advance the travel regulations for the intended destination, including rules for communicable disease if a staff member is infected, and rules for their return home.

### ADDITIONAL MEASURES DURING INCREASED RISK

At times of elevated risk, Public Health may provide additional direction for communicable disease.

Follow all Public Health orders, guidance and recommendations relevant to your workplace, industry or region. You may need to re-assess your workplace to identify areas or activities creating an increased risk to workers. You may need to implement measures required during the response to COVID-19. Refer to [WorkSafeNB's key COVID-19 protocols](#).

### Step 3: Communicate measures, practices and policies

Make sure everyone entering the workplace, including workers from other employers, receives information about your measures, practices and policies for mitigating communicable disease.

- ❑ Advise your managers and supervisors on measures, practices and policies and ensure they understand their responsibility as leaders to ensure they are followed.
- ❑ Ensure all workers are informed of all communicable disease preventative measures in the workplace and their responsibilities.
- ❑ Ensure workers are informed on policies for staying home when sick and/or working from home.

- ❑ Post signage to support and reinforce the measures you have implemented.
- ❑ Engage with your employees. Appreciate that many may not be fully informed or have anxiety about health risks in the workplace. Open, two-way conversation is essential in effectively mitigating risk.
- ❑ Be mindful that some aspects of mitigating communicable disease in the workplace may raise privacy and confidentiality issues. Seek advice from legal or other experts on these issues, as necessary.

### Step 4: Continually evaluate and update your plan to reflect changing risk levels and work practices.

Ongoing review of Public Health directives, notices and advisories and workplace changes, including practices and processes, will help ensure your plan is current and effective.

- ❑ JHSCs and health and safety representatives play an important role in identifying and resolving workplace health and safety issues. When identifying and resolving safety issues, consult with your JHSC or health and safety representative (or, in smaller workplaces, other workers).
- ❑ Conduct workplace inspections and ensure ongoing supervision to confirm measures are functioning properly, followed and maintained.
- ❑ Monitor your workplace and risk level along with the guidance, orders and recommendations from Public Health (as required in Step 1) and adjust your plan as necessary.
- ❑ Update your plan to reflect changes in your workplace, including work processes, staff and premises.
- ❑ Make sure workers know how to raise health and safety concerns.
- ❑ Know the steps you must take if there is a work refusal related to communicable disease.

### BREAKING CHAINS OF TRANSMISSION

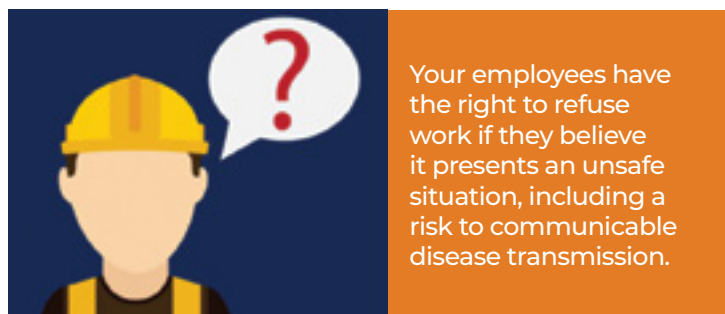
Even with higher vaccination rates, it's expected there will continue to be people who test positive for COVID-19. Current evidence indicates that fully vaccinated individuals will be less susceptible to illness and/or experience

mild illness. Special conditions, however, such as vulnerable settings, large-scale outbreaks or regions experiencing high hospitalization rates, may need additional protective measures to break the chains of transmission.

Public Health will continue to support individuals, workplaces, organizations and communities to reduce transmission when outbreaks occur. If an employee or patron at your workplace tests positive for COVID-19 or another communicable disease:

- ❑ Follow the directions provided by Public Health.
- ❑ Advise staff to adhere to Public Health direction regarding isolation and contact notification.
- ❑ Use the recommended communication tools provided by Public Health for contact notification, outbreak management and public advisory messaging.

### RIGHT TO REFUSE



Consider work refusals on a case-by-case basis, assessing all facts. Fear or anxiety about a workplace risk that is not supported by facts is not grounds for a work refusal. All those involved in a work refusal must follow a process. For more information on the right to refuse unsafe work and your role as an employer, please visit [COVID-19 and the right to refuse at worksafenb.ca](https://www.worksafefb.ca).

### OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES

Under the *Workers' Compensation Act*, employers must file an *Employer Report of Injury or Illness* when an employee experiences a workplace-related injury or illness, requiring time away from work or medical treatment beyond first aid. Employers must submit the report within three days from the: date of the accident/injury; date of the diagnosis of illness; or date your employee reported the injury or illness to you.

Employers must also follow the *Employment Standards Act* and *Human Rights Act*.

For more information, visit [worksafenb.ca](https://www.worksafefb.ca) or email [prevention@ws-ts.nb.ca](mailto:prevention@ws-ts.nb.ca).

# COMMUNICABLE DISEASE PREVENTION PLAN

## TEMPLATE FOR NEW BRUNSWICK EMPLOYERS

This template can help employers document and communicate communicable disease prevention measures, practices and policies. This template is an optional resource that may be used or adapted as suited to the individual employer. This template is not meant for workplaces that have an existing infection prevention and control (IPC) plan related to communicable disease, such as health care authorities and long-term care facilities.

### Step 1: Assess the risk

Preventing communicable disease requires assessing your risk for communicable disease transmission in the workplace.

Document your process for monitoring and reviewing communicable disease-related information issued by New Brunswick's Chief (or regional) Medical Officer of Health and WorkSafeNB. Include answers to the following questions.

- Who is the person responsible for reviewing and monitoring information?
- What is the process and/or frequency for the information review?

Document risks specific to your workplace. Include answers to the following questions.

- How likely is it that workers would come into contact with people who have the virus, including other workers, suppliers, clients and customers?
- Is the layout of my workspace putting individuals at risk?
- Does my business type and services I provide put individuals at risk?
- How do workers perform their job? Can job duties be modified to reduce risk to communicable disease?
- Do I have workers who may be more vulnerable to the effects of communicable diseases?
- What's my percentage of staff vaccinated against communicable diseases, like COVID-19 and influenza (if known)?

Helpful resource: [Reducing COVID-19 risk in community settings: A tool for operator](#)

## Step 2: Implement measures, practices and policies to mitigate the risk

Preventing communicable disease involves implementing ongoing measures to mitigate the risk for communicable disease transmission in the workplace.

Document your policies and supporting practices here. Include answers to the following questions.

- Is the building ventilation adequate? Are ventilation systems properly maintained and functioning as designed? (See [Section 20.](#))
- For employers without ventilation or direct control of their building's ventilation system: What measures do I take to improve air circulation? (See [Section 20.](#))

- Do I have the required hand-hygiene facilities and appropriate supplies? (See [Section 6\(1\)](#)).
- Do I have policies and signage to remind workers to wash or sanitize hands and cover coughs and sneezes?

Helpful resources: [Ventilation and air circulation](#), [Handwashing poster](#), [Use hand sanitizer](#), [Prevent infection with soap and water](#).









- What steps will I take if there is a work refusal related to communicable disease?

## Other notes

Use this space to document any other important information (updates, reference materials, consultation with JHSC/workers, etc.).