



# Guide for Communicable Disease Prevention



# INTRODUCTION

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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 is an elevated risk of communicable disease.

As COVID-19 restrictions ease, there may continue to be risks and challenges related to COVID-19 and other communicable disease in the workplace. Existing COVID-19 Operational Plans, practices and policies are still very relevant and should be considered when transitioning to a communicable disease plan. Communicable disease prevention focuses on basic risk reductions principles, similar to COVID-19, and as such established COVID-19 practices may be sufficient in disease prevention.

As an employer, you are responsible for the health and safety of anyone working in or visiting your workplace. Managing communicable disease at your workplace is part of an effective occupational health and safety (OHS) program.



# COMMUNICABLE DISEASE PREVENTION

As an employer, you're obligated under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (see Section 12 (1)(a) - Duties of Employers) to take every reasonable precaution to ensure the health and safety of your workers. This includes the prevention efforts to eliminate or minimize the risk of transmission of communicable disease in your workplace.

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 disease that may circulate in a workplace include COVID-19, norovirus, and seasonal influenza.

This guide describes a four-step process to help employers develop a communicable disease plan. Your plan may be supported by policies, signage, or other materials as appropriate to your workplace and the level of risk. Some employers may benefit from documenting their plan to assist in planning and communicating their communicable disease prevention measures, practices, and policies. A template is provided at the end of this guide for that purpose.

This plan does not need to be approved by the Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) or the Occupational Health & Safety (OHS) division of the Workers Compensation Board of PEI (WCB PEI).

## Step 1: Understand the Risk

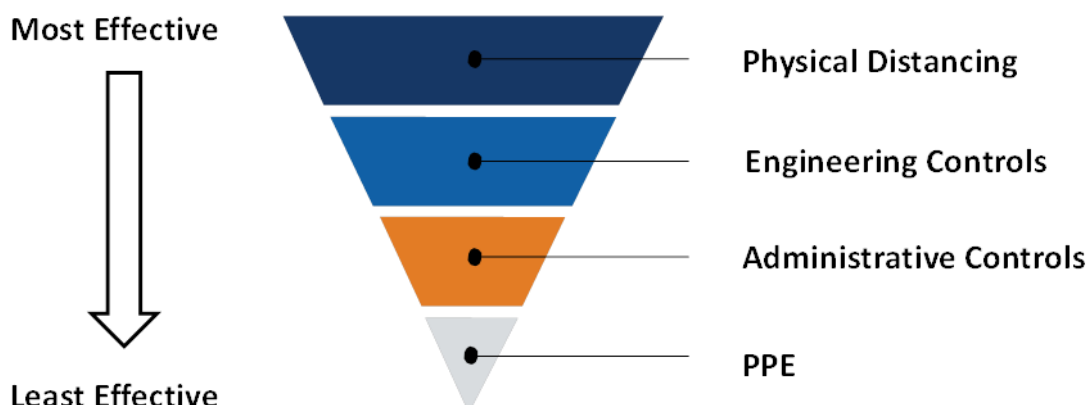
Preventing communicable disease involves taking ongoing measures to reduce the risk of communicable disease transmission in your workplace. It also involves implementing additional measures, when advised to do so, during periods of elevated risk.

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

- Monitor and review communicable disease-related information issued by the [CPHO](#) and/or the WCB PEI if it's related to your industry, region, or workplace. This includes orders, guidance, notices, and recommendations.

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

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 below. Physical distancing is always the most effective control, then engineering controls, and so on.



As an employer, you should implement and maintain the following measures at all times.

- Implement policies to support staff who have symptoms of a communicable disease (e.g., fever or chills, coughing, diarrhea) so they can avoid being at the workplace when sick.
- Provide hand-hygiene facilities with appropriate supplies. For more information, see section 2.6 of the [OHS General Regulations](#).
- Use policies and signage to remind workers to wash their hands regularly and to cover coughs and sneezes.
- Maintain a clean and sanitary environment through routine cleaning processes that are appropriate for your industry and work practices. For more information, see section 5.1 (a) (ii) of the [OHS General Regulations](#).
- Make sure building ventilation is adequate and ventilation systems are properly maintained and functioning as designed. For more information, see section 11 of the [OHS General Regulations](#).
- Support employees in receiving vaccinations for COVID-19 and other vaccine-preventable conditions.

During a period of elevated risk, the CPHO and/or the WCB PEI will provide information and guidance about the risk and how you can reduce it. The measures that you'll need to implement will depend on the type of disease and the methods of transmission.

- Follow all orders, guidance, recommendations, and notices issued.
- Depending on the guidance provided, you may need to assess the workplace to identify areas, activities, and processes that may pose a risk to workers. You may also need to implement appropriate control measures to reduce the risk.

### 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 managing communicable disease. A template is provided at the end of this guide that employers may find useful for this purpose.

- Ensure all workers understand the measures in place at your workplace.
- Provide all your workers with information on policies for staying home when sick and working from home.
- Post signage in your workplace to support the measures you have in place.
- Make sure your supervisors are knowledgeable about your measures, practices, and policies, and incorporate these into supervision practices at the workplace.
- Provide information, signage, and materials to workers in a language they understand.
- Be mindful that some aspects of managing communicable disease in the workplace may raise privacy and confidentiality issues.





## Step 4: Monitor your workplace and update your plan as necessary

Continuously evaluate and update your plan to reflect changing risk levels and work practices.

- Joint health and safety committees, and safety representatives, play an important role in identifying and resolving workplace health and safety issues. When identifying and resolving safety issues, involve joint health and safety committees and safety representatives (or, in smaller workplaces, other workers).
- Use workplace inspections and ongoing supervision in the workplace to ensure measures are functioning properly, followed, and maintained.
- Monitor public guidance, notices, orders, and recommendations. Adjust your plan as necessary.
- Monitor your workplace and risk level.
- Change your measures, practices, and policies as necessary.
- Update your plan to reflect changes in your workplace, including work processes, staff, and premises.
- Ensure workers know how to raise health and safety concerns.

## Right to Refuse

Your workers have the right to refuse work if they believe it presents an unsafe situation, including a risk to communicable disease transmission.

When addressing a work refusal, it is important to recognize that every refusal is assessed based on circumstances specific to the worker and their workplace. A worker can refuse work if a reasonable assessment of the risk suggests there is an immediate or imminent threat to their safety.

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, see the [OHS Act](#) (Section 28-31) or visit Work Refusal Information at [wcb.pe.ca](http://wcb.pe.ca).



## Planning Template

The following template may be useful for employers in documenting and communicating their communicable disease prevention measures, practices, and policies. This is an optional resource, and may be used or adapted as suited to the individual employer.

### Step 1: Understand the risk

Preventing communicable disease involves taking ongoing measures to reduce the risk for communicable disease transmission in the workplace.

*Document your process for monitoring and reviewing communicable disease-related information. This should include the person responsible for reviewing and monitoring information as well as the process and/or frequency for the information review.*

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

Implement policies to support staff who have symptoms of communicable disease so they can avoid being in the workplace when sick.

*Document your policies and supporting practices here.*

### **Hand Hygiene Facilities**

Provide hand-hygiene facilities and appropriate supplies (see section 2.6 of the [Occupational Health and Safety General Regulations](#)). Use policies and signage to remind workers to wash their hands and to cover coughs and sneezes.

*List your policies and supporting practices here.*

### **Cleaning**

Maintain a clean and sanitary environment through routine cleaning processes that are appropriate for your industry and work practices. For more information, see section 5.1 (a) of the [OHS General Regulations](#).

*List your policies and supporting practices here, including the answers to the following questions.*

- *What is the cleaning schedule at your workplace?*
- *Who is responsible for cleaning?*
- *Do cleaners have appropriate supplies and training to do their job effectively and safely?*

## **Ventilation**

Make sure building ventilation is adequate and ventilation systems are properly maintained and functioning as designed. For more information, see section 11 of the [OHS General Regulations](#).

For employers without ventilation, or without direct control of their building's ventilation system, they may take other measures to improve air circulation, including opening windows.

*Document any additional measures in place at your workplace here.*

## **Additional Measures**

During a period of elevated risk, the CPHO or the WCB PEI will provide information and guidance about the risk and how you can reduce it. The measures that you'll need to implement will depend on the type of disease and the methods of transmission.

*Document any additional measures in place at your workplace here.*



### **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 managing communicable disease.

*Document your answer to the following questions.*

- *How are measures, practices, and policies communicated at the workplace?*
- *How are supervisors informed of measures, practices, and policies, and kept up to date with changes as they are made?*
- *Identify any workplace signage used to communicate measures.*

### **Step 4: Monitor your workplace and update your plan as necessary**

Continually evaluate and update your plan to reflect changing risk levels and work practices.

*Document your answer to the following questions.*

- *How is the joint health and safety committee, or safety representatives, involved in the ongoing evaluation of measures, practices, and policies at their workplace?*
- *What is the mechanism at your workplace for workers to escalate health and safety concerns?*
- *What is the process in place at your workplace to monitor whether measures, policies, and practices are being followed?*



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