

COVID-19: Employers, Stay Calm, But Be Proactive!

The spread of COVID-19, commonly referred to as "Coronavirus", is of increasing concern, particularly in the workplace. While we cannot predict the evolution of this pandemic, employers should nonetheless immediately take action particularly to ensure the health of their employees and maintain their operations. Below is a summary of the measures we recommend.

1. Develop a business continuity strategy

- ☐ Determine the tasks essential to the functioning of the organization
- ☐ Plan human resources and their interchangeability within the organization when necessary
- ☐ Assess and plan the supply of material and technological resources
- ☐ Evaluate external resources and their ability to maintain their services to the organization and increase their service offer if necessary.

2. Communication channels

- ☐ Identify those responsible within the organization for any situation related to COVID-19
- ☐ Inform employees of the identity and contact information of these people
- ☐ Pay attention to the confidentiality of employees' personal information in the event of illness or quarantine

3. Remind employees of good hygiene practices

- ☐ Frequent hand washing using warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds
- ☐ Do not touch eyes, nose and mouth if hands have not been washed
- ☐ When an employee is coughing or sneezing, their mouth and nose should be covered with their arm, elbow or handkerchief

4. Implementing adequate sanitary measures

- ☐ Provide employees with the necessary tools (soap, paper, tissues, alcohol-based disinfectant, etc.)
- ☐ Increase the cleaning frequency of common areas and surfaces regularly touched with hands (door handles, telephones, keyboards, etc.)

5. Inform employees to be vigilant of certain symptoms

- ☐ Fever
- ☐ Cough
- ☐ Breathing difficulties

6. Ask employees to stay home if they have symptoms and inform the person in charge

7. Stay informed of any developments regarding the control of the crisis

- ☐ Monitor the situation closely with the authorities, such as the [WHO](#), [Health Canada](#) and the [Government of Québec](#)

See, in particular, the [measures taken by the federal government on March 11, 2020](#):

- ☐
 - Elimination of the mandatory waiting week for Employment Insurance sickness benefits
 - Enhancement of the Work-Sharing Program to assist employers and employees experiencing a business downturn due to COVID-19

In particular, consult the measures taken by the provincial government on March 12, 2020:

- ☐
 - Forced quarantine for people returning from abroad and working for the State, in the health, daycare and education sectors
 - Voluntary quarantine for people returning from abroad or who have flu-like symptoms
 - Salary continuance for State employees during the quarantine period (for the private sector, measures should be announced in the next few days)
 - Encourage telework

8. Travel

- ☐ Refer to government sites concerning countries at risk. For example, consult [notices of the Government of Canada](#)

Issuing travel directives:

- ☐
 - Prohibited places, if any
 - Prior approvals
 - Cancellation Policy
 - Return-to-work arrangements

Issue personal travel directives:

- ☐
 - Communication of places visited
 - Return-to-work arrangements
 - Flexibility in the application of the holiday policy

9. Employees at risk of contracting COVID-19

Invite any employee having a higher risk of being more severely affected by COVID-19 to communicate their condition to the identified responsible person.

- ☐
 - Respiratory failure
 - Seniors
 - Chronic disease
 - Weakened immune system
 - Cardiac pathology, etc.

Take appropriate measures to protect these employees:

- ☐
 - Teleworking
 - Positioning of the location within the company

10. Meetings and events

Issue guidelines regarding the conduct and participation of employees in internal and external meetings or events:

- ☐
 - Use of technological means
 - Limitation of the number of participants
 - Cancellation or postponement of events
 - Take measures regarding the external participants' state of health
- ☐ Avoid direct contact for greetings

11. Teleworking

- ☐ Assess the feasibility of enabling telework
- ☐ Assess technological needs
- ☐ Assess the need to ask employees to make a habit of leaving work at the end of their shift with their work tools

12. Develop guidelines on absences (compensation, authorisation, prevention, teleworking, flexibility, management of abuse, etc.)

- ☐ If the employee has symptoms or is suffering from COVID-19
- ☐ If a family member is symptomatic or has COVID-19
- ☐ If the employee has come into contact with a person with COVID-19
- ☐ If the employee is to be quarantined
- ☐ If the employee voluntarily goes into quarantine
- ☐ If an employee refuses to report to work because of the presence of another potentially infected employee
- ☐ If the employee children's school or child care facility is closed

13. Harassment

- ☐ Be alert to signs of harassment
- ☐ Ensure that employees are not discriminated against
- ☐ Do not penalize or retaliate against justified absences

While it is not possible to consider each and every situation, an employer's proactivity will enable the latter to make more informed and timely decisions. Without being alarmist, the current situation calls for employers to be prudent and foresighted. Therefore, employers should adopt a plan of action based on the reality of their respective businesses.

Do not hesitate to consult our [labour and employment law team](#) to help you implement a reliable and effective plan of action to deal with the spread of COVID-19.



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