Guidelines for Reopening Office Environment Workplaces

Introduction

As the Government of Saskatchewan begins to roll out its plans for a gradual reopening of the economy, businesses are seeking out guidance and practical steps on how to transition back into the workplace. The objective for any business during this time should be protecting and prioritizing employee health and safety and communicating with and managing the expectations of various stakeholders, such as employees, customers, members, vendors, suppliers, contractors, etc.

The focus of this document will be on practical containment and mitigation strategies that can be implemented at the office environment workplace level. Specific employer interventions discussed here include initial screening and contact tracing, physical distancing, and infection control measures. Within a workplace, people, tangible goods, and information all go in and out daily. Two of those things – people and tangible goods – can be possible carriers of the virus and need to be proactively managed.

Not only is this the right thing to do for both employees and customers alike, but under the *Saskatchewan Employment Act* employers have a legal obligation to maintain a safe and healthy workplace. Even during a pandemic, employers must demonstrate due diligence of the law.

Initial Screening and Contact Tracing Measures

As witnessed in several east Asian countries early on, successful containment strategies are proactive and begin at the point of first contact. It is likely during the initial phase of an eventual planned and gradual reopening; businesses will be hesitant to schedule in-person meetings should the restrictions on working on site be relaxed. Reducing in-person meetings and other large gatherings, as well as holding site meetings in open spaces or outside is prudent, but should in-person meetings need to go ahead, here are some tips to prevent virus spread:

- Before accepting an in-person meeting, ask visitors to complete a brief questionnaire containing key health screening questions, ideally in advance and before greeting them at the front entrance.

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- Possible screening questions could include: if they or a family member are presenting symptoms (sore throat, fever, sneezing, coughing, loss of taste, smell and appetite, body aches) consistent with COVID-19; whether they have travelled (including within Canada) in the past two weeks; or if they been in close contact with someone who is suspected of, or tested positive for, COVID-19.
- If a visitor answers "yes" to any of the above-mentioned questions, tell the visitor not to come into the workplace and to call or email the business instead. Advise them to self-isolate at home.
- Encourage visitors both when they arrive and leave to wash their hands in the washroom or any other designated handwashing station. Minimize staff kitchen traffic to staff use only.
- Post signage that identifies the location(s) of handwashing stations with clear instructions. Clearly visible signage should also be posted at the front entrance with screening questions for people who drop in.
- A guest sign-in log sheet should be maintained as a contact tracing measure in the event a visitor is found to be infected. The sign-in sheet should contain relevant information, like the name of the guest(s), their organization, along with the start and end times of each visit.

Physical Distancing Measures

Workplace physical distancing through the deliberate increasing of physical space between people is an effective workplace intervention for reducing the virus' rate of reproduction and delaying the disease peak. The purpose of physical distancing is to minimize both the *frequency and time duration* of person to person interactions to better manage the risk of virus spread. Here are some helpful guidelines for the workplace:

- Establish criteria for the number of staff that should be in the office at one time, as well as guests.
- Generally, ensure people always stay at least 6 feet or 2 metres apart.
- Increase the physical distance between workstations, especially if you have an open concept office. If you are unable to do so, consider installing physical barriers such as cubicle walls or other barriers. Alternatively, reduce the number of people working in the office space at one time.
- For meetings and training sessions, continue to use video and/or teleconferencing solutions.

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- If you must meet in person, limit the number of people meeting in a boardroom, for example, up to a maximum of 10 people at any given time. Reduce this number as needed for each meeting room, to ensure the maintenance of 6 feet or 2 metres apart between people. In any case, physical distancing measures should align with current public health guidelines in both spirit and intent. Move one-on-one meetings to a larger meeting space whenever possible (or keep the 2-metre distance in offices).
- Minimize face-to-face interactions among staff. Utilize internal office messaging platforms, email or phones to interact.
- Prioritize which staff/roles should be working in the office versus those who could work from home. Some important considerations include the availability of childcare (i.e. whether daycares and schools are still closed at that point) and the degree at which the staff/role is customer or public facing. It is likely that when businesses start to reopen, it will be expected that those that can work from home, should work from home.
- Divide staff into groups and rotate each unit by having one group work in the office and the other group work from home for varying time lengths. Stagger the arrival and leave times of employees in 5, 10, or 15-minute intervals to prevent an overlap of employees all arriving or leaving at once.
- Have a contingency plan in place should a staff member be absent (personal illness, ill family member, childcare if schools closed, etc.). Determine who does what in the event a staff member is unable to perform their duties as assigned. In the event a manager or supervisor is unable to carry out their duties, develop a clear chain of command contingency plan to maintain day-to-day decision-making capacity.
- Consider movement and traffic in the office. For example, similarly to grocery stores, mark certain hallways as one-way or encourage people to move through the office clockwise only.
- Where appropriate, structurally limit physical contact between staff and customers (e.g. plexiglass barriers between workstations or customer-facing front desks).
- Arrange lunch and break rooms to follow physical distancing practices. Consider staggered lunch and break times to reduce the number of staff gathering in one place.

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Infection Control Measures

- Workplaces will need to have in their possession the necessary supplies before reopening to ensure the health and safety of staff and customers. This includes sourcing and stocking soap, hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, and possibly personal protection equipment (PPE) like non-surgical masks, latex gloves, etc. where appropriate. Workplaces should strive to maintain a 30-day supply when possible.

- Rationing the use of scarce cleaning supplies on a per-staff/per day basis will be necessary given the limited supply of such products. This requires a staff member to actively manage this process. Having a game plan that enables supply chain flexibility in the event suppliers are unable to meet their obligations will be key to success. If products are in short supply locally, workplaces should consider reaching out to local breweries or distilleries making alcohol-based hand sanitizer as an alternative sourcing measure in the interim.

- Staff should routinely wipe down high-traffic areas and surfaces daily, such as door handles, kitchen appliances (fridge, microwave, coffee maker, cabinet handles), copiers, mail machine, board room tables (before and after meetings). Staff should refrain touching another staff member's desk, computer, or phone.

- Ensure the hygienic handling of items that come into contact with the broader population - staff should routinely wipe down tangible goods like laptop bags, briefcases, electronics, food and beverage containers, etc. coming in and out of the workplace, as the Coronavirus can live on the surface of these goods for an extended period of time.

- Remove public share items such as candy jars or washroom toiletry baskets, to avoid contamination.

- Implement a policy for staff and guests to bring and use their own dishware and cutlery, for example, coffee mugs and water bottles. Individual staff will be responsible for taking their dishes and cutlery home each day to be cleaned.

- Minimize use of shared appliances, such as the fridge, dishwasher, stove and microwave. Implement a policy for staff to clean and disinfect appliances after use. Staff should wear gloves when handling items that are dirty/used by other staff or guests.

- Offer disposable dishware and cutlery for guests.

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- If a staff member tests positive for COVID-19, a routine and targeted deep cleaning of the facility will be necessary to ensure a safe and healthy workplace. This may involve shutting down the workplace during normal work hours.

General Tips for all Workplaces

- Educate both staff and customers on good hygiene habits.
- Minimize the physical sharing of documents and other tangible items. Whenever possible, share information electronically. Implement a protocol for handling physical documents when necessary.
- Keep work-related travel to a minimum.
- Try an alternate no-touch greeting. Instead of a handshake, try a polite bow or a wave of acknowledgment.
- Anyone with COVID-19 like symptoms, or with a family member in their home with COVID-19 like symptoms, must self-isolate at home.
- Most importantly, if a staff member or guest is sick for any reason, just stay home.

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