

COVID-19 Proposed Protocols for the NPAFC Secretariat Office

Original Date: June 30, 2020

Date of revision: November 25, 2020

The following are final protocols for the NPAFC Secretariat to consider in order to implement workplace guidelines recommended by Minister Bruce Ralston in his May 13, 2020 presentation to Consular Corps of B.C. in regard maintaining the ongoing health and safety of staff and British Columbians during the current COVID-19 pandemic. These protocols will be revisited in the coming months as updates to the pandemic are received.

Bolded are the guidelines from Minister Ralston and the draft protocols or considerations for drafting a protocol are below each guideline.

Guidelines for Organizations and Public Institutions

The Ralston presentation noted that we have a number of tools in our tool kit to modify to reduce transmission risk in our office: contact intensity (how close you are to someone and for how long); and number of contacts (how many people in same setting at same time). These include:

- Physical distancing measures—to reduce density of people
- Engineering controls—physical barriers, increased ventilation
- Administrative controls—rules and guidelines
- Non-medical masks

We have considered these in developing the protocols.

CORE WORKPLACE GUIDELINES

These protocols were updated according to the WorkSafeBC's guide for employers to develop a COVID-19 Safety Plan. Protocols are considered and listed here from the highest level of protection to the lowest.

1. First level protection (elimination)

Continue to encourage working from home to reduce contact intensity and number of contacts in the workplace.

All staff are requested to work from home if physical presence in the office is not required to do tasks.

Employer provides technical opportunity to staff to do most of tasks remotely. When there is no such opportunity, tasks may be rescheduled.

Where this is not possible or in addition to working from home policies, enable employees to have less contacts by suggestions that include:

- a. Using alternating schedule or work hours for individuals or groups.
- b. Teams are to work together virtually.
- c. In person group meetings are not to be held.

Occupancy limit for the entire office is five (5) people at a time. Occupancy limits for common areas (copy room, storage, kitchen, and the reception area) are one (1) person at a time.

Number of visitors is limited to a maximum of two (2) people at the same time via appointment only, a record of visitors is to be made. Visitors and staff are to wear masks and maintain physical distance. Beverages are not to be offered to visitors at this time. Signage is posted on the entrance door with instructions for visitors. NPAFC staff to wipe down door handles after visitor leaves.

Deliveries are to be dropped off in the reception area and accepted in contactless manner. Staff are required to wear masks when interacting with delivery personnel. Packages should be unpacked using disposable latex gloves provided by employer to reduce the risk of fomite transmission. Staff is required to wash hands after handling deliveries and mail.

2. Second level protection (engineering)

A partition is to be installed to separate the Administrative Assistant (AA) workstation from high traffic common reception area, and the window in the wall between the AA and the Administrative Officer (AO) spaces is to be kept closed.

3. Third level protection (administrative): rules and guidelines

Employer is to make sure that rules and guidelines are communicated clearly to avoid any misunderstanding or misinterpretation by employees.

Guidelines to actively promote and monitor personal self care actions

Staff are expected to respect the following guidelines for Personal Self Care and for Managing Social interaction. These guidelines will be distributed by e-mail to all staff and will be posted at the entrance. In the spirit of maintaining the health of everyone, staff should raise any concern about any activity or interaction immediately.

Guidelines for Personal Self Care

No hand shaking; practice good hygiene (*frequent hand washing*); maintain reasonable physical distance when out; if you have symptoms of a cold, flu, or COVID-19 you must stay home; if you are at greater risk get informed.

From Ralston May 13, 2020 presentation—added frequent hand washing note

Guidelines to actively promote and implement core measures for managing social interaction in congregated social areas (kitchens, staff rooms, canteens, shared public spaces)

- a) Entrance to building, elevator and office main door: The building management, IMPEX, has posted COVID-19 protocols throughout the building and requested all individuals to keep their social distance. In addition, they require that:
 - only two (2) persons are allowed in the elevator at a time and,
 - masks are mandatory inside the building.

IMPEX note that additional daily cleaning of surfaces in common areas is being done throughout the building.

- b) Common areas: masks are now mandatory inside the building (including its common areas such as restrooms and the elevators) and inside the Secretariat office's common areas (i.e., conference room, copy room, storage room, kitchen, reception area, etc.).
- c) Offices: two (2) people can meet in an office as long as a 2m distance is maintained.
- d) Kitchen: one (1) person at a time in the kitchen and surfaces/appliances must be wiped down after each use. Staff are to use individual use dishes and utensils and not to share them with others. Only disposable paper towels to be used to wipe hands and surfaces (do not use cloth towels).
- e) Meetings: all meetings of more than two (2) people must be held virtually.
- f) Bathroom: masks are now mandatory in common areas including bathrooms. Staff will have individual washroom keys, and common washroom keys will be disinfected after each use.

- g) Workstations: the current office arrangement does not allow for proper physical distancing measures between workstations in the copy room. Additionally, high traffic areas will concentrate people close to one another as they pass by to use other common areas such as the bathroom or the kitchen. Employees who had their workstations located in the copy room are requested to be working from home. No individuals are allowed to be sitting and working at the workstations during this time.
- h) Conference Room: the conference room may be used as a temporary workstation office for one (1) person, if necessary. If it is being used as a workstation, it should not be used for meetings. The room should only serve one (1) purpose. If the conference room is used for meetings, the meetings should be with no more than two (2) people to keep social distance. All staff meetings and meetings with partners should continue to be held virtually.
- i) Protective Equipment: the Secretariat provides cleaning/disinfection supplies with disposable gloves and masks.
- j) Circulation of mail and magazines among all staff is to be stopped, mail, magazines and important financial documents are circulated only to key staff. Such staff is to wash hands after handling circulated materials. Paper folders should be replaced by vinyl folders so that they can be disinfected after each use.

Guideline to ensure that individuals who have the symptoms of a cold, flu, or COVID-19, including any coughing or sneezing, do not come into the workplace

Staff are required to stay home if they have ANY cold, flu or COVID-19 symptoms. If they come to work, they will be asked to return home. Any surfaces they contacted will be disinfected. A signage is posted on the entry door indicating that employees or visitors exhibiting such symptoms are not allowed to enter the office.

Guideline to use flexible working hours to avoid exposure in public transit during rush hours

Public transit is used by the majority of the staff to get to and from the office each day. During rush hours, public transit is crowded, and the physical distancing measure cannot be adhered to. This increases staff exposure and risks of bringing the disease into the office. If possible, staff should maintain physical distancing recommendations during their commute by avoiding taking public transits during these peak hours. This could be achieved by staff taking advantage of flexible working time (Memo #A16-01) which allows working 7.5 hours between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. The hours should be agreed upon with their supervisor. Masks are recognized as offering some protection when social distancing is not possible.

4. Fourth level protection: using masks

Staff are requested to use masks when social distancing cannot be adhered to. Employer provides disposable masks for use in the office.

Implementation of effective cleaning and hygiene practices

Require and sustain high levels of frequent cleaning of high-touch areas in workplace throughout the day and availability of hand sanitizers stands at entrances or around the workplace.

- a) Provide sanitizer and sanitizing materials at the reception counter and in the kitchen
- b) Building management has organized daily sanitizing of high-touch surfaces such as the kitchen, copy room, reception area, boardroom, doorknobs and light switches.
- c) Staff is also asked to wipe down such surfaces after each personal use, including surfaces and appliances in the kitchen, photocopier, mailing machine, answering machine, alarm panel, stamps, stapler, hole puncher, etc.

Other considerations:

- 1. Process for modifying the guidelines:** Employer monitors orders, guidance and notices issued by Provincial Health Officer, the situation in the workplace and updates safety plan as necessary. Any concerns or ideas for modification of the protocols can be raised at our weekly staff meeting. Private concerns can be raised with your supervisor or with the Executive Director.
- 2. Returning to the office:** Currently, the government recommends that people continue working from home when possible to keep risk of exposure and contact low. Until that changes, staff will continue to work remotely with an option to return at their discretion, with permission and approval from their supervisor. Return to work should be organized by such a manner that allows avoiding social distancing violation.
- 3. Sick leave policy:** Standard sick leave policies apply to illness resulting from COVID-19.

Period of validity

This protocol will be revised after receiving new recommendations/guidelines/policies from the relevant authorities including the Office of Protocol, Government of B.C., and Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Staff will be informed on any change by the Executive Director or his designates.

Useful links:

WorkSafeBC

<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/about-us/covid-19-updates>

BC Centre for Disease Control

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19>

Government of BC Orders, Notices & Guidance

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/current-health-topics/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>

Government of Canada COVID-19 Information

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>