

Risk-Informed Decision Making Guidance for Construction Sites Operating During COVID-19

As the challenges caused by the COVID-19 outbreak continue to shift, we are taking unprecedented measures to slow the transmission of COVID-19. While existing Public Health Special Measures Order (refer to <https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/>) allow construction industry to continue, assessing risk for the construction project/task as it relates to the spread and/or transmission of COVID-19 remains critical.

For specific guidance for the construction industry, **COVID-19 and the Construction Industry and Information for Workplaces**, go to <https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/>.

Workplaces can implement key measures to limit the spread of the virus in their settings. The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends employers and business owners conduct a risk assessment when determining the specific public health actions related to a workplace/business during the COVID-19 pandemic. This involves considering the epidemiology of the disease, assessing characteristics of the workplace/business settings and its employees/clients, and assessing the weight (importance) of associated risks. Decisions to respond to COVID-19 within the workplaces/businesses can be considered on a continuum from minimal changes needed (e.g., promoting public health messages), to enhancing communication for employees, contractors and clients, to implementing risk mitigation strategies, to closing the workplace.

Employers and business owners can use Public Health Agency of Canada risk assessment tool in combination with NL public health measures and guidance information to consider risks associated with their workplace/business, the implementation of risk mitigation strategies, and in consultation with Public Health, decisions to close workplaces, <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/risk-informed-decision-making-workplaces-businesses-covid-19-pandemic.html>.

For example, is a Project Manager from outside of NL included as an exemption for self-isolation while in NL working at the construction of the acute care facility in Western Health? Using the risk assessment tool and NL Public Health information here are the key questions and answers:

Traveling

1. **Does your workplace/business conduct frequent domestic/international travel?**
Yes, for Project managers only. High Importance
2. **Does NL have Public Health orders in place for travelers?** Yes. The NL Public Health Exemption Order states: Asymptomatic workers in the trade, transportation, mining, hydro-electric and oil and gas sectors, including truck drivers and crew on any plane, helicopter, train, or marine vessel, including fish harvesting vessels, arriving in Newfoundland and Labrador from another province or territory in Canada are exempted from the requirement to self-isolate for 14 days only while these workers are travelling to and from their home and place of work in the province. When not working, these workers must otherwise self-isolate while in the province.

3. **What are the suggested risk mitigation strategies from Canada Public Health Agency assessment tool?**
 - Actively monitor [travel advisories](#) and provide information about the risk of travel;
 - Cancel all non-essential travel outside of Canada;
 - Assess the need for business travel based on the risks and benefits, and consider alternative approaches such as virtually attending meetings;
 - Plan for absenteeism or alternative working arrangements (i.e., teleworking) if international travelers are unable to return to the workplace as per PHA advice.

4. **What are the NL Public Health orders and guidance in place for prevention and control of COVID-19 in your industry?**
 - Refer to COVID-19 and the Construction Industry COVID-19 and the Construction Industry and Information for Workplaces Guidance. For example:
 - Encourage employees to stay home if they're sick;
 - Limit sub trades and non-essential personnel on-site and limit customer interactions;
 - Use virtual meetings to reduce group gatherings; and
 - Keep operators isolated.

Based on the risk assessment, the Project Manager from outside of NL is included as an exemption for self-isolation while in NL working at the construction of the acute care facility in Western Health, if the person is asymptomatic. However, as traveling is weighted as high importance in the risk assessment, the best risk mitigation strategy would be to consider alternative approaches such as arranging to have the Project Manager conduct his work virtually. If the Project manager must be on-site, then review the assessment questions specific to other infrastructure, environmental cleaning and other related questions.

The risk assessment tool for workplaces and businesses in the Canadian context is based on advice contained in the World Health Organization's guidance and in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance, and on public health assumptions that reflect the currently available scientific evidence and expert opinion.