# CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) - FAQ for Employees

[as of March 16, 2020]

## **GOVERNMENT PLANNING AND RESPONSE / GENERAL**

### Q1. How is government managing COVID-19 in the workplace?

We have a coordinated corporate structure and process in place to respond to COVID-19 planning and response. The Department of Health and Wellness and Emergency Management Office (EMO) is managing health system planning and broader provincial impacts. Service Nova Scotia/Internal Services and the Public Service Commission are working on internal Business Continuity Planning for government. And all departments have senior officials and other designated staff working on critical business planning for their core operational areas. We are also encouraging work from home options whenever possible to support social distancing.

### Q2. Who do I contact if I have questions?

If you have questions, you can speak to your manager or contact your HR Business Partner (list at end of FAQ). There are also Business Continuity Planning and Senior Official Committee representatives within each department who are working on government's COVID-19 response.

### PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

### Q3. Who do I contact with questions about my leave or pay?

Questions can be addressed to your manager or HR Business Partner. Here are some quick tips for you:

- If you are working from home, you will be paid the same as always.
- If you are self-isolating due to travel you will be put on leave with pay. You will be expected to work from home if you can.
- If you are self-isolating and become ill, please notify your manager. Your time will recorded in the system as sick-time.
- Of course, if you become ill outside of the process, please follow public health's advice – do the self assessment and/or call 811.

If you have questions about leave or pay, please contact your HR Business Partner (list at end of FAQ).

# Q4. I am a manager and in the middle of recruiting for a position/setting up interviews. Should I continue?

Deputy Ministers or their designates will determine which job postings and interviews should proceed based on departmental business continuity planning. If the position is critical, there may be other ways to conduct the process using teleconferencing or other means. Routine job posting and interviews should be suspended until further notice.

### Q5. What is happening with government training?

All government training is suspended until further notice. If you are scheduled for training, information on rescheduling of classes and other options will be shared in the coming weeks and available on TheHUB.

#### SELF-ISOLATION AND ABSENSES FROM WORK

#### Q6. When should I self isolate?

As a public sector employee, if you have travelled anywhere outside Canada, including the United States, you are directed to self-isolate for 14 days upon your return.

You should also self-isolate if you are feeling unwell with cold or flu-like symptoms, or if you believe you have come into contact with COVID-19.

If you have symptoms, or develop symptoms, you should complete the <u>online assessment</u> to determine if you need to contact 811 regarding testing for COVID-19. Public health advice may change quickly as the COVID-19 situation evolves. Please consult government's <u>coronavirus</u> (COVID-19) website for complete and up-to-date health advice, including when you should self-isolate or be tested.

# Q7. I am self-isolating. Will I still get paid?

There are different reasons why you may need to self-isolate and this will determine your workplace arrangement. Regardless of your situation, you will continue to be paid.

Here are some scenarios:

#### You are <u>directed</u> to self-isolate (e.g. because you travelled outside Canada):

- If you are well, and you can work from home (e.g., you are equipped and your job allows), you are expected to work. You will be paid as usual.
- If you cannot work from home, you must enter your absence in the <u>Employee Self Serve</u> (<u>ESS</u>) <u>portal</u> using the "Record Working Times" feature and record your time as "Personal Leave Paid" in the drop-down list.

You are <u>choosing</u> to self-isolate (e.g., because you have had contact with someone who has or may have COVID-19, or are caring for someone who is self-isolating):

- If you are well, and you can work from home (e.g., you are equipped and your job allows), you are expected to work. You will be paid as usual.
- If you cannot work from home, you will use the Short Term Illness (STI) program. Your manager will enter your absence in the Absence Management Portal.
- If you are sick with cold or flu-like symptoms, or become sick while you are self-isolating, you will use the Short Term Illness program.

**NOTE:** Employees should continue to report absences in <u>ESS</u>, and Managers should continue to report absences in the <u>Absence Reporting Portal</u> to ensure all employees are supported appropriately during absences.

If you have questions about your specific situation, contact your HR Business Partner (list at end of FAQ).

# Q8. I have a child or other member of the family who lives with me and is returning from a trip outside Canada. Should I self-isolate too?

Yes, it is recommended that you self-isolate as well, and you will be supported for your absence (see Q7).

### Q9. Will I need a sick note from a doctor if I'm home sick or self-isolating?

No, you will not be asked for medical documentation (sick note) for any absence needed to follow public health advice related to COVID-19. If you are using the Short Term Illness program (see Q7), you may be contacted by a case manager from Morneau Shepell to offer support.

#### Q10. What is the Short Term Illness Program?

The Short Term Illness (STI) Program supports employees during illness or injury related absences over 4 days and up to 100 days. The program is delivered by a third-party provider, Morneau Shepell. If you are using STI for an absence related to coronavirus/self-isolation (see Q7), a case manager will reach out to you to ask questions and offer support. You will not need to provide medical documentation (sick note) if you are using STI for these purposes.

### Q11. Where is the Absence Reporting Portal and how do I use it?

The Absence Reporting Portal can be found <u>here</u>. Managers should already be reporting absences in this portal. There are guides and resources to help you provided on the portal.

### Q12. What if I've already used all my Short Term Illness?

If you have used all your Short Term Illness leave, you should speak with your HR Business Partner (list at end of FAQ).

# Q13. What happens if I'm not able to report my absences in ESS or my manager hasn't entered them in the Absence Reporting Portal for some reason. Will my pay stop?

No, your pay will not stop. If you are unable to report absences because you do not have access to the portal, or if you forgot to make an entry, you should speak to your HR Business Partner (list at end of FAQ).

### **WORKING FROM HOME**

### Q14. How do I determine if I can work from home?

You may be able to work from home if your job does not require that you be physically at your workplace to perform your core duties, and if you have the tools and technology you need (e.g., laptop, cell phone, VPN connection) to be able to work remotely. You should speak to your manager about whether you can work from home.

# Q15. I could work from home if I had the tools (e.g. laptop, cell phone). How do I get these?

We are working to secure more resources such as laptops, however, we must also consider other priority and potential needs, such as for COVID-19 planning and response. Our first priority is to support the health care system. You should speak to your manager about the possibility of working from home and what arrangements or equipment may be required. Please be patient as we equip staff and get our servers ready to have more people working from home.

### Q16. I/my team am not used to working remotely. Are there any tips or guidelines?

**Using Technology** – Make sure you/your team knows how to effectively use tools like Skype for Business, Email, Yammer, and VPN, as part of Government's Microsoft Office 360 package. If you /your team are not familiar with these tools, check YouTube for tutorials. We are also providing more information and advice on working remotely shortly.

**Sharing Information** – Decide as a group what information needs to be shared, with whom, and how frequently it needs to be shared. Information sharing can be made easier through SharePoint sites and libraries, shared folders on OneDrive, and Yammer groups. Decide what knowledge needs to be shared in-person vs. digitally and set reminders in your schedules to ensure you meet deadlines.

#### **TRAVEL**

# Q17. What's the status of business travel in government?

All business travel to outside the province has been suspended until further notice. Only travel within the province that is related to core duties of a job should continue at present. Deputy ministers or their designates will decide which travel within the province is essential. Please speak to your manager about any planned business travel within the province. When cancelling travel or meetings, please check with organizers and travel companies to determine refund options. For additional advice on cancellations, contact <a href="mailto:transactionalservices@novascotia.ca">transactionalservices@novascotia.ca</a>.

# Q18. I had to cancel my vacation because of the coronavirus situation. Will I lose this my vacation time?

No employee will lose vacation time due to coronavirus. If, due to coronavirus, you had to cancel vacation, or if you have unused vacation time that you won't be able to take or carry over because your carry over and accumulated banks are full, please speak to your manager to ensure the time is documented so that you can take it later.

# Q19: I have personal travel planned. Should I go? If I have to self-isolate after I return, will I be paid?

Whether you decide to take personal travel is your decision. You will not be penalized. If you travel anywhere outside Canada, including the US, you are directed to self-isolate for 14 days upon returning to the country. Before you return to work, please check your government email and public health websites for the latest information as it may change rapidly. If you choose to cancel vacation plans, please speak with your manager or HR Business Partner to ensure you don't lose vacation time.

You should be mindful when travelling to countries with active travel health notices.

### Q20. Do I have to tell my manager about my personal travel plans?

You are encouraged to let your manager know about upcoming travel plans for planning purposes, but you are not obligated to do so.

# **WORKPLACE SAFETY (OHS)**

# Q21. Why can some people work from home, but I have to come to work where there may be more risk?

The reason we are sending people home to work is to employ the concept of 'distancing'. We want to thin out our workspaces. This concept of social distancing (e.g., fewer people in the workplace, in food courts, on transit etc.), will help prevent the potential spread of the coronavirus. Some jobs require employees be physically in the workplace to perform their core duties and to maintain essential public services. Even with some employees working from home, it is safer for all because it supports social distancing. If you are not able to work from home all the time, speak to your manager about other possibilities, like performing some duties at home, or adjusting your hours to avoid busiest times on transit, for example.

# Q22. My job involves dealing with the public. What do I do if someone appears ill or showing cold or flu-like symptoms?

When interacting with the public, you should follow public health advice and practice social distancing, keeping 2 metres (6.5 feet) away from people. If you have interacted with someone who appears ill, you should speak with your supervisor or manager immediately. Depending on the details of the situation, you may be sent home, or advised to call 811 if you start to feel unwell. Supervisors/managers will contact cleaning services to clean high touch areas and equipment.

# Q23. An employee attended a public event where another attendee was later confirmed to have COVID-19. Should the employee be required to self-isolate, and do others in the same work location need to take any precautions?

Public health officials will be involved with COVID-19 positive case management and contact tracing. Currently, there are no broad health recommendations for all participants to self-isolate based on attending an event. Each situation will require assessment and review on an ongoing basis as public health continues their contact tracing. Keep an active list of the attendees and contact numbers in case the workplace is contacted by public health. If the event is in another jurisdiction, more information may be available through that public health authority. The employee and other employees should self-monitor for symptoms, and if they develop flu like symptoms to then immediately self-isolate and contact 811 to determine if they require testing. As usual, hand washing, not touching faces, cleaning of commonly touched surfaces, cough/sneeze etiquette, and staying home if one is sick should be promoted at every opportunity.

### Q24. Am I at risk of coronavirus if I handle mail or cash or accept packages?

There is no evidence to suggest that handing mail is a significant risk factor for being exposed to respiratory viruses including the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19. However, washing your hands after handling objects such as mail or money, and avoiding touching your face, especially with unwashed hands, will help reduce any possible risk.

# Q25. Someone in my workplace has or may have COVID-19. Should employees be told? Should we all be sent home?

Your health and safety is our top priority. We must let employees know about hazards in the workplace under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHS). We must also protect the privacy of individual employees. If employees are exposed (e.g., at an event or meeting, or in the office) to a suspected COVID-19 case, we will let them know. Managers may consult with others, including their JOHS or Business Continuity Planning representatives, senior officials in the department and/or public health to determine appropriate action. Actions will be determined on a case-by-case basis. We will not disclose details regarding personal health information.

### Q26. An office in my building has closed. Should our offices be closed too?

Managers will determine closures such as this on a case-by-case basis.

# Q27. I don't feel safe in my workplace because I have a compromised immune system. What can I do?

You should speak to your manager about working from home if you are able to. If that is not possible, you can discuss other options with your manager, including taking Short Term Illness (see Q7).

# Q28. I notice someone in my workplace isn't following public health advice (e.g., not washing hands, not using proper etiquette when sneezing). What can I do?

If you have a positive relationship with your co-worker, you may want to talk to them and express your concern about it. Or you may prefer to speak with your supervisor/manager about it. They may be able to resolve the issue with a discussion and some reminders to your co-worker and/or all the team. You should also report the incident in the Environment, Health and Safety Management (EHSM) System, either online or on paper, whichever system you have in your department.

# Q29: Will government provide face masks, gloves, and disinfectant spray/wipes to offices?

Health Canada does not recommend that people without COVID-19 symptoms wear masks. There is a potential risk of infection with improper mask use and disposal. The same potential risk exists with using gloves. Washing your hands frequently for 20 seconds with soap and water is an effective prevention strategy. If soap and water is not readily available, alcoholbased hand sanitizer is recommended. High touch surfaces should also be cleaned frequently. Managers should ensure high touch areas (doorknobs, light switches, phones, keyboards, toilets, etc.) are being thoroughly and regularly cleaned. Having recommended hand sanitizer, wipes and cleaners available to staff would aid in ensuring proper hygiene. Use as directed on packaging.

### Q30: I don't feel my workplace is safe. Can I refuse work?

If you have reason to believe your workplace is not safe, you have a right to refuse work. There is a process. You must report your refusal to your manager/supervisor, and document it in the Environment, Health and Safety Management (EHSM) System, either online or on paper, whichever system you have in your department. Your manager/supervisor may re-assign you to other work while investigating the work refusal and will determine the appropriate next steps.

# Q31: What if a co-worker or employee comes to work wearing a face mask? Should they be sent home?

Health Canada does not recommend that people without COVID-19 symptoms wear masks. Some employees may choose to wear a mask as a personal preference. This is not a mandated requirement, but it is a personal choice we support. However, if the person is wearing the mask because they are feeling unwell, they should go home immediately and follow public health advice, including completing the online assessment tool or contacting 811 to determine if they need testing.

# Q32. If we are asked to provide employee or client information due to COVID-19, what do we do?

Public employees have a responsibility to balance individual and employee privacy with public health and safety considerations. The *Health Protection Act* allows public health officials, on behalf of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, to request and collect personal information and personal health information during public health emergencies. If you are asked for information from a public health official in response to COVID19, the Act requires you to make every effort to comply with their request.

### Q33. I'm feeling anxious about COVID-19. What should I do?

If you're feeling anxious about the coronavirus, you're not alone. Consult trusted public health sources and follow the information and advice there, including government's coronavirus (COVID-19) website. If you need to, you can talk to a professionally trained counsellor through our Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP). They can connect you with resources to help with emotional concerns like stress and anxiety, financial and family matters, or other issues that might arise during this time. The service, provided by Morneau Shepell, is confidential and available for you 24/7 by calling 1-800-777-5888.

# **EMPLOYEE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT**

Government coronavirus (COVID-19) website – for public health information, advice and more: <a href="https://novascotia.ca/CoronaVirus/">https://novascotia.ca/CoronaVirus/</a>

The HUB – for government employee and HR-related updates <a href="https://novascotia.sharepoint.com/sites/thehub">https://novascotia.sharepoint.com/sites/thehub</a>

Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP): 1-800-777-5888

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