CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for Civil Service Employees

UPDATED: April 7, 2020 (1:00 p.m.) **[NEW]** or **[UPDATED]** indicates information changed or added since the version posted to TheHUB on March 26, 2020. Also incorporates FAQ added March 30, 2020 on Exposure/Potential Exposure in the Workplace.

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 physical distancing and implementing all public health directives and advice in the workplace that apply.

Q2. Who do I contact if I have questions?

If you have workplace related 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.

Q3. What does the provincial state of emergency mean? Should I stay home if I travelled outside Nova Scotia or if there are more than five people in my workplace?

The provincial state of emergency, announced March 22, 2020 and currently in effect until noon on April 19, 2020, serves to support and enforce public health directives to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It highlights the seriousness of the issue and that all Nova Scotians must comply with directives for self-isolation, self-quarantine and physical distancing.

The state of emergency means there are to be no social (non-essential) gatherings of more than five people. Any workplace or business not deemed essential (or not already required to be closed before March 22, 2020) can remain open as long as a two-metre (6 foot) distance can be maintained. It also means anyone entering Nova Scotia – whether they have travelled internationally or from another province – must self-isolate for 14 days. There are exemptions from the inter-provincial travel directive for healthy workers who deliver critical services including, but not limited to, health care workers, corrections, policing, child protection services, and trucking, and for healthy people commuting to work.

If you have or develop symptoms at any time, you should self-isolate and 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 (COVID-19) website</u> for complete and up-to-date health advice, including when you should self-isolate or be tested.

Q8. [UPDATED] I need to self-isolate or stay at home. Will I still get paid?

There are different reasons why you may need to self-isolate or be at home and this will determine your type of leave. Regardless of your situation, you will continue to be paid.

There are pay codes for people who are healthy but absent from the workplace for various reasons, rather than using the Short Term Illness (STI) program.

The most common scenarios are

- Regular Pay If you are working from home, including while self-isolating, or on an adjusted/reduced schedule due to COVID-19, you will continue to be paid the same as always.
- 2. **Pandemic Leave-Directed** If your job doesn't enable you to work from home, and you are *directed* to self-isolate by the Public Health orders, due to travel outside Nova Scotia or because you have been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19, you will be paid under this code.
- 3. **Pandemic Leave-Personal** If your job doesn't enable you to work from home, and you are absent for personal reasons related to COVID-19, such as no available childcare due to daycare closures, care of a family member etc., you will be paid under this code.
- 4. Short Term Illness (STI) If you are unwell due to COVID-19, have an underlying health condition or are suffering from severe anxiety that causes you to be unable to work, you will use STI. (For non-COVID related illness, continue to use STI as usual.)

Please speak with your manager about leave and working from home. If your job requires you to be in the workplace and is critical to maintaining operations, please work with your manager to determine arrangements. If you have further questions, contact your HR Business Partner (list at end of FAQ).

Reporting:

Employees should continue to report absences in <u>ESS</u> or timesheets using the correct codes (regular pay, one of the Pandemic Leave codes, or STI) as is the normal process.

Managers will report "healthy absences" (#2 & 3 above) by emailing the PSC's Absence Management Team at AbsenceManagement@novascotia.ca with the employee's name and contact information on the first day they are absent. Someone from Absence Management will contact the employee for information and advise the employee and their manager/supervisor of next steps, ensuring the correct pay codes are used. The process is outlined in detail in a Manager Service Centre email.

Q14. [UPDATED] With daycares closed, I don't have options for childcare. What should I do?

If you don't have childcare options, you may work from home if it's possible (e.g., you are equipped, your job and manager allows). If you are not able to work from home, you will be supported (see Q8, #3). If your job requires you to be in the workplace and is critical to maintaining operations, please work with your manager to determine arrangements.

Q15. I have a child or other member of the family who lives with me who is self-isolating. Should I self-isolate too?

Current public health advice does not require you to self-isolate unless your child or family member has or develops symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, difficulty breathing) during their isolation period. However, you may choose to work at home if you are able to do so. If you are at home because you are caring for someone who is unwell or in self-isolation and are unable to work from home, you will be supported (see Q8, #2).

Q16: [NEW] I'm a salaried employee who is working an adjusted/reduced schedule to support physical distancing in the workplace. How should I report my time? Does this affect my pay?

If you are in a job where working from home is not an option, you may now be working an adjusted or reduced schedule due to a reduction in services or to create physical distancing in the workplace. For example, an office with four employees may have alternating shifts of two staff working two days on, two days off. Your salary will not be reduced as a result of these measures. Your manager will keep track of scheduling, but it will not be recorded in the Manager Self-Service (MSS) Portal or Absence Reporting Portal.

Q17. [NEW] Will there be pay for excluded employees working overtime during this pandemic?

If there are exceptional circumstances, these will be considered on a case-by-case basis at a later date.

WORKING FROM HOME

Q18. 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 physically be 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.

Q22. What are the technology requirements for working remotely?

The minimum requirements to connect to the government network in order to work from home are:

- Review the <u>Managers Technology Quick Reference Guide</u> and speak with your manager
- Ensure you have working internet
- Ensure you have a government issued computer (laptop or desktop). You will need the following hardware:
 - Laptop: charger
 - Desktop: desktop power cable, monitor, monitor power cable, monitor display cable, keyboard, mouse, and network cable, review this <u>checklist</u> to ensure you have everything you need.

If you wish to access your shared files and your government applications remotely on your government issued laptop, **you must do the following while in the office:**

- Ensure your computer is connected to the government network via a wired cable (not through Wi-Fi).
- Log into your computer with your current network ID and password.
- Ensure Global Protect is installed and working on your computer.
- Verify all essential software is installed and working for you to perform your day-to-day duties. For example, Skype, Outlook (email), Internet browser (test any websites/applications that you need to do your work), etc.

Q23. How do I get IT support?

IT Service Desk hours are Monday to Friday from 8:00 am – 7:00 pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm. To contact the Service Desk, call 902-424-7777. You can also access support by submitting a service request through the Client Self-Service portal.

NOTE: The Service Desk does not provide onsite support while you are working outside of government offices.

Q24. Can our provincial data network handle so many people suddenly working at home?

With the shift to working remotely, many people are relying on key tools to support their work. There are some things you can do to help support our provincial data network and ensure our systems perform during this critical time:

- Turn off your video while in video conference meetings.
- Limit work-related streaming from your computer (e.g., watching videos or webinars, etc.), as this will help manage congestion on our network.
- Don't use your work computer for non-work related activities (e.g., Netflix, YouTube, music streaming services, Facebook, etc.).

Q30. How do I work from home if I have no computer?

If you could work from home but do not have a computer to do so, talk to your manager. They can approve you to <u>order a new device</u> if necessary. If you don't have a government issued computer, you can use your personal device, but you will only have access to <u>Outlook Webmail</u> and Office 365.

NOTE: Due to COVID-19 all requests for new hardware will be prioritized and some requests may not be processed immediately. In addition, during this time, substitutions may have to be made.

Q31. Will I get security updates when working remotely?

Yes, you will continue to get security updates when working remotely, as long as your computer has Global Protect installed and is connected to the network. If you are unsure if your computer has Global Protect and is connected, check the Global Protect installation instructions.

Q32. My home network connection is slow, what can I do?

Turn off video when you are on conference calls. Limit streaming on your computer while connected to work. Do not stream non-work related content (i.e. Netflix, YouTube, etc.) from your work computer. Do not connect to Facebook, Twitter, and other social media (use your personal devices instead). If anyone is using online video games this may also impact your home network speeds.

Q33. Can I use my government issued cell phone to create an internet hotspot?

Yes. If you do not have sufficient internet in your home and you have a government issued mobile phone (iPhone, BlackBerry), you can use it to create a hotspot. Instructions: <u>create a hotspot on iPhone</u>, or <u>create a hotspot on BlackBerry</u>.

Q34. How do I print while working remotely?

If printing is not required for your job, try to find alternatives to printing documents from your work computer. We do not recommend connecting your work computer to a home printer. If you need to view multiple files at the same time, consider <u>connecting an additional monitor</u> to make that easier.

If you require a printer for your work, speak to your manager about ordering one through the client self-service portal.

Q35. I don't have a laptop. Can I bring my desktop home?

Yes. Please refer to this <u>checklist</u> for the steps you need to take before you can bring your desktop home as desktops don't have the same Wi-Fi capability as laptops.

- Are you maintaining a good balance between home and work?
- Are you taking physical and mental health breaks?

You should discuss any hazards you identify with your manager and take necessary steps to mitigate risks. For more information, please reach out to your department's OHS professionals or to the Public Service Commission's OHS team at PSCSafety@novascotia.ca.

TRAVEL

Q40. 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 transactionalservices@novascotia.ca.

Q41. I had to cancel my vacation because of the coronavirus situation. Will I lose this my vacation time?

No, you will not lose vacation time due to coronavirus. If, due to coronavirus, you had to cancel vacation or 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. Once managers have approved this time, they should refer it to their HR Business Partner.

Q42. I have personal travel planned. Should I go? If I must self-isolate after I return, will I be paid?

Nova Scotians have been directed to leave the province *only* if it is essential. Anyone entering the province through all entry points (land, sea, air) will be stopped, questioned and told to self-isolate for 14 days. There are a few exemptions, but not for pleasure travel.

If for some reason you do travel outside Nova Scotia, please check your government email and public health websites for the latest information before you return as it is changing quickly. If you must cancel vacation plans, please speak with your manager or HR Business Partner to ensure you don't lose vacation time. Please be mindful if travelling to countries with active travel health notices.

Q43. 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.

o Maritime Museum of the Atlantic – 1655 Lower Water Street We will share more information as other options are identified. If you do not have access to parking, please discuss options with your manager.

Q48. NEW What is my responsibility for contract employees? What advice do I provide them?

Contract managers are expected to provide the same public health guidance to contractors and contract employees as they do to our own employees as it relates to remote work, travel restrictions, self-isolation requirements, physical distancing, good hygiene, etc.

Q49. [NEW] What should be done about regular office support services, like garbage collection, paper shredding pick ups, office deliveries etc.?

Departments, through their Business Continuity planning, should determine a plan for these services based on the status of their workplaces (e.g., open or closed, on site staffing levels etc.) and whether those services are needed during this time. Contact your Business Continuity representative to determine how they should be handled in your department.

WORKPLACE SAFETY (OHS) / POTENTIAL EXPOSURE TO COVID-19

Q50. [UPDATED] 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 where possible is to support physical distancing. Fewer people in our workplaces, in food courts, on transit etc. will help prevent the potential spread of the coronavirus and enable those who must be in the workplace delivering critical services to employ physical 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.

Managers will protect the health and safety of employees who are required to be in the workplace to provide critical services by ensuring that all public health directives and advice are followed. There is additional information on working during COVID-19, including advice for reducing risk, for all employers on the <u>coronavirus website</u>.

Q51. [NEW] Why are some offices required to stay open?

All government departments continue to provide critical services to the public. These are regularly reassessed based on the current situation. Some employees who provide critical services must be in the workplace to carry out their core duties. In these situations, departments are looking at all possible arrangements to protect the health and safety of employees. This includes changes to scheduling, service delivery and physical spaces to support physical distancing. Some examples would be rotating shifts, making more services available online or by phone, or designing processes to ensure physical distancing and minimize personal contact with clients, if that applies.

Q54. Am I at risk of coronavirus if I handle documents/mail or cash, or accept packages? Should I wear gloves?

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.

The best protection is offered through washing your hands after handling objects, and avoiding touching your face, especially with unwashed hands to reduce any risk associated with handling documents, mail or packages. Surfaces (e.g., tabletops, countertops) should be thoroughly cleaned with soap and water or disinfectant cleaners. Always wash hands after cleaning surfaces.

The use of gloves hasn't been specifically recommended and can give users a false sense of protection and lead to complacency:

- Users may cross-contaminate surfaces or infect themselves by touching their face while wearing gloves, touch gloves with bare hands when removing;
- mistakenly wear gloves too long and not change in between tasks; or
- fail to wash hands after removing gloves.

Q55. [NEW] With new information about the use of non-medical/homemade masks to prevent COVID-19, should I wear a non-medical mask at work?

Wearing a non-medical mask is a personal choice. Health Canada says wearing homemade masks in the community has not been proven to protect the person wearing it. Strict hygiene and physical distancing will reduce your chance of being exposed to the coronavirus. Wearing a non-medical mask is an additional measure you can take to protect others – like sneezing or coughing into your sleeve – when it is difficult to maintain physical distancing.

If you opt to wear a non-medical mask, take the following precautions to protect yourself:

- wash your hands immediately before putting it on and immediately after taking it off (in addition to practising good hand hygiene and physical distancing while wearing it)
- it should fit well (non-gaping)
- avoid touching your face mask while using it
- don't rub your eyes
- change a cloth mask as soon as it gets damp or soiled
 - o put it directly into the washing machine or a bag that can be emptied into the washing machine and then disposed of
 - cloth masks can be laundered with other items using a hot cycle, and then dried thoroughly
- non-medical masks that cannot be washed should be discarded and replaced as soon as they get damp, soiled or crumpled
 - o dispose of masks properly in a lined garbage bin

It's important that medical grade masks be reserved for healthcare workers and those on the front lines who really need them. Your department may have guidelines for the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) in the workplace.

Q61. [UPDATED] Someone in my office tested positive for COVID-19/was in contact with someone who has COVID-19? What happens now?

Anyone who is a confirmed case of COVID-19 will be under the care and direction of Public Health, who will identify their close contacts. If there are close contacts in the workplace, Public Health will notify those employees directly with instruction to self-isolate and to arrange testing. Public Health may also contact the manager if there are broader workplace impacts.

If you do not receive a call, or the workplace is not notified directly, the risk has been assessed as low, and you can continue to come to work. The workplace will be cleaned and disinfected thoroughly, with special attention to high-touch surfaces and commonly used areas.

You should continue to practice good hand hygiene, use cough and sneeze etiquette, clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces and objects regularly, and maintain physical distancing. You should also monitor your health and if you develop symptoms, self-isolate immediately and complete the <u>online assessment</u> to determine if you need to call 811 about testing.

Managers should follow Public Health direction when they are involved and consult with their HR Business partner about whether they should communicate with employees, at all times maintaining individual privacy.

There is more information on how we <u>manage exposures or potential exposures in the workplace</u> available on TheHUB.

Q62. [NEW] How does Public Health define a "close contact"?

Public Health defines a close contact as someone who has had sustained contact within the 2-metre (6 feet) distance with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19. Sustained contact can vary, for example, if someone was within the 2-metre distance for a shorter period but their co-worker (who has now tested positive) sneezed or coughed directly on them, they would still constitute a close contact. Sustained contact can also be cumulative over the span of a day. That is why it's so important to maintain physical distancing (2 metres or 6 feet) and regularly and properly wash hands and clean and disinfect high-touch areas (e.g., doorknobs, surfaces, etc.).

Q63. [NEW] A co-worker tested positive for COVID-19/was a close contact for someone with COVID-19. Some people in our office received a call from Public Health but I haven't. Why not? What should I do?

If you are identified as a close contact, Public Health will reach out to you directly, typically within 24 hours, with further instruction to self-isolate and be tested.

If you are not contacted, the risk would have been assessed as low and you may continue to come to work.

As always, you should continue to follow public health advice around personal hygiene and physical distancing, monitor your health and, if you develop symptoms, complete the <u>online assessment</u> to determine if you need to call 811 about testing.

If an employee or client has been in your workplace showing flu-like symptoms, additional enhanced cleaning services will be completed on high-traffic areas and surfaces. If an employee or client with a confirmed case of COVID-19 has been in your workplace a deep cleaning may be required, which may include spraying the floors, walls, etc. with disinfectant. Guidance will be given by Public Health and facilities management.

To arrange cleaning, managers should contact their assigned Property Officer at the Real Property Services division of TIR or their department's manager of facilities. If you are unsure who that is, please contact Jennifer.Eddy@novascotia.ca. There is more information on cleaning-procedures available on TheHUB.

MENTAL HEALTH

Q70. [UPDATED] What do I do if my staff experience or witness racist or discriminatory behaviour against a person of Asian descent?

This is unfortunate, unacceptable and upsetting. It is also a violation of our Respectful Workplace Policy and illegal under the *Nova Scotia Human Rights Act*. This is true whether the behaviour happens with another employee or a client/customer/member of the public.

If you experience discrimination in the workplace, you have several options to address the behaviour. This includes talking to the person engaging in the behaviour if appropriate and safe, speaking to your manager or HR Business Partner, or contacting Workplace Resolution by email at workplaceresolution@novascotia.ca or telephone at 1-888-465-2444. If you are responding directly to the person, always assess the situation and never put yourself at risk. Your actions don't need to involve confrontation.

We know that discrimination has a harmful impact so you may also want to talk to someone through the Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) or the Office of Workplace Mental Health.

If you are not the direct recipient of the discrimination, but a witness to it, you will still want to respond in order to help stop it. Standing up to racism can be a powerful sign of support and can make the perpetrator think twice about their actions. If the incident happens in the workplace, the options for a bystander are the same as noted above — say something to the person, talk to your manager, your HRBP or contact Workplace Resolution.

If the incident happens outside the workplace, there are still options for addressing the matter. Anyone who feels they have been discriminated against may contact the Human Rights Commission at 902-424-4111 (toll-free: 1-877-269-7699) or https://hrcinguiries@novascotia.caCommission. TTY services available via 711.

There are also more mental supports and links, such as the Kids Help Line, listed on the government's coronavirus website under mental health and well-being.

EMPLOYEE CONFIDENTIALITY

Q72. How do we maintain confidentiality/privacy for employees who may be suspected of having COVID-19?

If a person is identified as a confirmed COVID-19 case, Public Health will work with the them to identify close contacts. If there are close contacts in the workplace, Public Health would notify those individuals directly and provide further direction. Public Health may also contact the manager of the employee(s) if there are broader workplace impacts.

Departments need to balance the employer's obligations under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (ensuring the health and safety of employees and employees right to know about hazards in the workplace) with their obligation to protect employee's privacy. If communicating to employees about exposures/potential exposures in the workplace, the privacy of the individual(s) involved must always be protected. There is more information on how we <u>manage exposures or potential exposures in the workplace</u> available on TheHUB.

Departments that need to track employee absence for COVID-19 related reasons should ensure that the privacy rights of employees are protected and access to any such data is restricted.

Q73. [UPDATED] Should an employee disclose to their manager if they tested positive for COVID-19?

Employees are not obligated to advise their employer of medical conditions and the employer does not have the right to ask an employee to identify their medical issue.

If an employee tests positive for COVID-19, Public Health may notify others in the workplace if they are identified as close contacts. The manager may also be notified if there are broader impacts for the workplace. If the manager/workplace is not notified by Public Health, the risk would have been identified as low, and the employees may come to work.

Employees or close contacts may voluntarily share information with managers.

Q74. [UPDATED] What should we do if an employee voluntarily provides the diagnosis (e.g. positive or negative COVID-19 test) to the employer?

An employee who tests positive for COVID-19 will be under the care and management of Public Health. If there are close contacts in the workplace, Public Health will notify and follow up with them directly. The manager will be notified if there are broader impacts for the workplace and will follow the direction of Public Health. If the manager/workplace is not notified, the risk would have been identified as low.

Government's regular COVID-19 media updates:

Livestreamed at: https://novascotia.ca/stayinformed/webcast/

Archived at: https://www.youtube.com/user/nsgov Audio recaps from Dr. Strang: https://anchor.fm/nsgov.

Government Social Media Channels:

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/nsgov/ Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/nsgov/

Twitter: https://twitter.com/nsgov

Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP):

1-800-777-5888

www.workhealthlife.com (type in Province of Nova Scotia)

Office of Workplace Mental Health:

902-424-2273

Toll free: 1-833-389-2267 OWMH@novascotia.ca

Government email - remote access:

https://outlook.office.com

(Use your network ID and password)

HR BUSINESS PARTNERS - DEPARTMENTAL CONTACTS

Department	HR Business Partner	Phone
Agriculture	Kenneth.MacKenzie@novascotia.ca	902-890-8911
Business	Kenneth.MacKenzie@novascotia.ca	902-890-8911
Communications Nova Scotia	Karen.Chambers@novascotia.ca	902-222-7794
Communities Culture and Heritage	Jennifer.Lewis@novascotia.ca	902-476-1815
Community Services – Central Region	Kim.Scott@novascotia.ca	902-430-8732
Community Services - Finance & Admin. (DCS); Employment Supports Income Assistance; Disability Support Program; Status of Women; Child; Youth & Family Supports; Service Delivery; Strategic Services; Office of the Minister & Deputy Minister	Heather.Glascock@novascotia.ca	902-240-3326
Community Services - Northeastern Region; Policy & Innovation	Pauline.O'Donnell@novascotia.ca	902-483-6029

	222 747 222
Michelle.Racine@novascotia.ca	902-717-2237
	902-499-2464
	902-240-3326
Heather.Glascock@novascotia.ca	902-240-3326
	902-219-0585
The state of the s	902-478-1269
Jennifer.Lewis@novascotia.ca	902-476-1815
Heather.DeCoste@novascotia.ca	902-499-2464
Dawnise.Kelly@novascotia.ca	902-225-9330
Kenneth.MacKenzie@novascotia.ca	902-890-8911
Heather.DeCoste@novascotia.ca	902-499-2464
Bernadette.Estabrooks@novascotia.ca	902-478-1269
Heather.DeCoste@novascotia.ca	902-499-2464
Bernadette.Estabrooks@novascotia.ca	902-478-1269
	902-499-2464
	902-478-9803
	902-225-9330
The state of the s	902-222-7794
Michelle.L.MacLean@novascotia.ca	902-223-1128
	902-229-6707
Navoda.Samarasekera@novascotia.ca	902-266-8410
Suzanne.Locke@novascotia.ca	902-717-4257
Heather, Shannahan@novascotia.ca	902-717-1466
1	
	Dawnise.Kelly@novascotia.ca Kenneth.MacKenzie@novascotia.ca Heather.DeCoste@novascotia.ca Bernadette.Estabrooks@novascotia.ca