



March 22, 2020

To Deputy Heads, Heads of Agencies (including separate Employers), Presidents of Regional Federal Councils, Heads of Human Resources

Colleagues,

I am providing direction to you today on the matter of employees in the workplace, in light of recent decisions taken by various provinces and territories to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the context of COVID-19, gatherings have been discouraged in order to limit the spread of the virus and [guidelines](#) have been developed for event organizers and planners to make decisions. Numbers of people constituting a gathering in this context has been reduced from 250 to 50 by the Public Health Agency of Canada, and even 5 in certain provinces.

As long as employees or visitors to the workplace are not required to be in close contact with each other, such as in a meeting room, a waiting area or a boardroom, the situation is not considered a gathering. Both the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) (PHAC) and Health Canada's [Public Service Occupational Health Program \(PSOHP\)](#) have provided specific advice which applies to the workplace. General advice includes:

- increasing awareness about COVID-19;
- evaluating the workplace for areas where people have frequent contact with each other and shared objects;
- increasing the distance between desks and workstations or spreading employees in office areas;
- adding signage for visitors and restricting access to people with symptoms; and
- ensuring frequent cleaning, providing access to handwashing areas and placing hand sanitizing dispensers in prominent locations.

We reiterate that managers are to consider on-site work only if the work meets the definition of critical service and working remotely to support it is not feasible.

The above interpretation is in line with instructions from national and local health agencies as of March 22, 2020. Evaluations of each workplace, in collaboration with the departmental OHS policy committee, the departmental workplace committee or the health and safety representative, can assist in ensuring that the guidance provided by PHAC and PSOHP (Health Canada) is applied and can support managers in determining how to continue delivering critical services as required.

Thank you again for your support as we all work through this evolving situation.

Nancy Chahwan

Chief Human Resources Officer
Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat / Government of Canada